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ABSTRACT

This state-mandated study examines the manner in which Braille instruction is being offered to Virginia's children with visual disabilities. The study sought to determine the need to require school divisions to offer Braille instruction; the role of Braille instruction as a viable method of promoting literacy; the number of students who could benefit from Braille instruction; the appropriateness of requiring Braille instruction and the increases in costs; the need for instructional and administrative organization, and instructional and support personnel; and the need for preservice and inservice training. Information was gathered through a public hearing, surveys, a review of methods for determining which students need Braille instruction, and statements from consumer groups. The study found that Braille is a viable method of promoting literacy among some blind and visually handicapped students. State and federal regulations mandate that Braille instruction be included in the Individualized Education Programs of students who need it. Braille instruction is available in all of Virginia's school divisions, either from a Vision Teacher or through services purchased from the Department for the Visually Handicapped. The study concluded that, while the lack of Braille instruction is not pervasive, there may be individual problems that require corrective action. Ten recommendations are offered. Appendices contain the state resolution calling for the study, survey results, and position statements from several organizations. (JDD)

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**REPORT OF THE
BOARD OF EDUCATION AND THE
DEPARTMENT FOR THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED**

A Study of Braille Literacy in Virginia's Public Schools

**TO THE GOVERNOR AND
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**

SENATE DOCUMENT NO. 31

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
RICHMOND
1991**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, there has been a national decline in the use of Braille by school-age students. This decrease has alarmed both consumers and educators of the visually impaired. During the past four years, these groups have mounted a national effort to ensure that Braille instruction is available to all children who need it and that it is taught by qualified teachers.

During the 1990 session of the Virginia General Assembly, two identical resolutions, SJR 36 and HJR 74, were passed. These resolutions requested the Board of Education to study the manner in which Braille instruction is being offered to Virginia's children with visual disabilities, and to report on:

1. the number of blind students who could benefit from Braille instruction but who do not currently receive such instruction;
2. the appropriateness of requiring Braille instruction to be offered to such students according to their Individualized Education Program (IEP);
3. the concurrent increases in cost associated with such instruction.

Using this information, the Board is to determine the need to promulgate regulations to require that Braille instruction be offered in the special education programs, and the need for instructional and administrative organization, instructional and support personnel, pre-service and in-service training, and resources to support the implementation of any recommendations.

Information was gathered through a public hearing, surveys, and a review of methods for determining which students need Braille instruction. In addition, consumer groups were asked to submit a written statement of their organization's position on the subject. The study concluded that Braille is a viable method of promoting literacy among some blind and visually handicapped students. There are already both state and federal regulations mandating that Braille instruction must be included in the Individualized Education Programs of students who need it. Braille instruction is available in all of Virginia's school divisions either, from a Vision Teacher in the school division or through services purchased from the Department for the Visually Handicapped (DVH).

Neither the Department of Education (DOE) nor the Department for the Rights of Virginians with Disabilities (DRVD) had received complaints that there were students who were not receiving Braille instruction when they needed it. However, at the public hearing and in two survey responses, there were accounts of students not receiving Braille instruction. While the lack of Braille instruction is not pervasive, there may be individual problems that require corrective action.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Board should not mandate Braille instruction for the entire population of blind and visually impaired children.

2. The Board should not promulgate additional regulations that require Braille instruction to be offered in public school special education programs.

3. Both the Board of Education and the Board of the Department for the Visually Handicapped should develop a policy statement that stresses the importance of offering Braille instruction by qualified teachers to meet the needs of students.

4. By the 1991-92 school year, the Department of Education (DOE), in cooperation with the Department for the Visually Handicapped (DVH), should develop and disseminate Educational Guidelines for determining a child's reading and writing preference and potential.

5. DOE and DVH, with input from consumer organizations, should develop workshops, inservice programs and college courses that will promote the use of Braille and provide a forum for upgrading teachers' skills.

6. DOE, DVH and the State Council of Higher Education should develop a Teacher of the Visually Handicapped teacher preparation program at one of Virginia's colleges.

7. DOE and DVH should develop a method for ensuring that all Teachers of the Visually Impaired are competent and have the ability to teach Braille.

8. DOE and DVH should develop a process that monitors the progress of students who are learning Braille.

9. DOE and DVH should develop a Braille awareness program that can be used in Virginia to educate school personnel, parents and the public about the use of Braille and the need to provide public information in Braille.

10. DOE and DVH should review the IEP's of all students who are receiving Braille instruction to determine the amount of instructional time each student is receiving.

Some costs will be associated with these recommendations for improving Braille instruction. These will be the expenditures required to develop workshops and a college program to prepare Teachers of the Visually Impaired.

In addition, if the evaluation of IEP's indicates that children need more intense Braille instruction, there are likely to be further costs associated with hiring additional teachers.

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PREFACE

In recent years, there has been a national decline in the use of Braille by school age-students. This trend has been documented through the American Printing House for the Blind "Distribution of Quota Registrants" reports. This decrease has alarmed both consumers and educators of the visually impaired. During the past four years, these groups have mounted a national effort to ensure that Braille instruction is available to all children who need it and that it is taught by qualified teachers.

During the 1990 session of the Virginia General Assembly, three bills related to a student's right to Braille instruction were passed.

One amended the Code of Virginia, Section 22.1-217, by adding the following statement:

> "Consideration shall be given to including Braille instruction in the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP), whenever appropriate."

The other two were identical study resolutions, SJR 36 and HJR 74; SJR-36 reads as follows:

> "RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Board of Education is requested to study the need to require school divisions to offer Braille instruction in their special education programs, and in cooperation with the Department for the Visually Handicapped, evaluate the role of Braille instruction as a viable method of promoting literacy among all blind and visually handicapped students in the Commonwealth. The Board shall determine (i) the number of blind students who could benefit from Braille instruction but who do not currently receive such instruction, (ii) the appropriateness of requiring Braille instruction to be offered to such students according to their IEP, and (iii) evaluate the concurrent increases in cost associated with such instruction. The Board shall determine the need to promulgate regulations to require that Braille instruction be offered in the special education programs, and the need for instructional and administrative organization, instructional and support personnel, pre-service and in-service training, and resources to support the implementation of any recommendations."

The study was conducted by staff from both the Department of Education and the Department for the Visually Handicapped with advice and review by the State Department of Education Advisory Committee for Programs for the Visually Handicapped. The study undertook to develop information responsive to seven issues:

1. Determine the need for the Board of Education to require school divisions to offer Braille instruction in their special education programs.

2. Determine the role of Braille instruction as a viable method of promoting literacy among all blind and visually handicapped students in the Commonwealth.

3. Determine the number of students who could benefit from Braille instruction, but who do not currently receive such instruction.

4. Determine the appropriateness of requiring Braille instruction to be offered to such students according to their IEP and the concurrent increases in cost associated with such instruction.

5. Determine the need to promulgate regulations to require that Braille instruction be offered in the special education programs.

6. Determine the need for instructional and administrative organization, instructional and support personnel to implement any recommendations.

7. Determine the need for preservice and inservice training, and resources to support the implementation of any recommendations.

Information was gathered through a public hearing and surveys of (i) Virginia's public school division special education administrators, (ii) vision teachers, (iii) state level vision consultants of the other 48 states who have one, and (iv) college and university vision program coordinators. Consumer groups were asked to submit a written statement of their organization's position on the subject. In addition, there was a review of best practices used both in Virginia and nationally in order to ascertain the best method(s) for determining students who need Braille instruction.

The study concluded that Braille is a viable method of promoting literacy among some blind and visually handicapped students. There are both state and federal regulations mandating that Braille instruction must be included in the Individualized Education Programs (IEP) of students who need it. Braille instruction is available in all of Virginia's school divisions either from a Vision Teacher employed by the school division or purchased from the Department for the Visually Handicapped.

Over the past four years, the percent of Virginia's legally blind public school children who read Braille has remained constant. Neither the Department of Education nor the Department for the Rights of Virginians with Disabilities had received any complaints

that there are students who are not receiving Braille instruction when they need it.

However, at the public hearing and in two survey responses, there were accounts of students not receiving Braille instruction. The study attempts to clarify the issue of Braille literacy as it relates specifically to Virginia's educational system, and to propose action to improve the effectiveness of services.

STUDY METHOD

A. Position statements and recommendations were requested from twenty-eight consumer and professional organizations. The following six organizations responded:
   1. American Foundation for the Blind
   2. Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired
   3. Central Virginia Council of the Blind
   4. Old Dominion Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired
   5. Richmond Area Federation of the Blind
   6. National Federation of the Blind of Virginia

B. Surveys were sent to the following categories of individuals who are not represented by a consumer or professional organization in Virginia:
   1. Vision Program Teachers (113 surveys sent)
   2. Virginia's Directors of Special Education (138 surveys sent)
   3. State-level Vision Consultants from the other 49 states (56 surveys sent)
   4. College and University Vision Program Coordinators (48 surveys sent)
   5. Advisory Committee for the State Library for the Visually and Physically Handicapped (14 surveys sent)

C. A public hearing, chaired by Delegate Marian Van Landingham, was conducted on July 10, 1990. Notification was sent to five newspapers: Richmond Times-Dispatch, The Washington Post, The Virginia-Pilot, Bristol Herald Courier, and Roanoke Times and World News. In addition, the notice was included in the Virginia Register and the Department for Rights of Virginians with Disabilities' "Action Alert." Individualized notices were sent to all Directors of Special Education and to twenty-eight consumer and professional organizations.

   Twenty-two individuals presented comments at the hearing, and nine additional citizens or organizations sent written comments. Those citizens offering comments included parents, representatives of consumer and professional organizations, school divisions, and Braille instructors.

D. A review of the literature was conducted through an ERIC search and personal contacts.

LITERACY AND BLIND STUDENTS

For the purpose of this study, "literacy" is defined to be the ability to read and write with ease and comprehension.

For the majority of school children, literacy means the ability to read and write print, but for the child who is totally blind or who has significantly reduced vision, an alternative method of reading and writing must be employed. The best means of literacy for these children, if they are physically and mentally capable, will be Braille. While this study evaluates Virginia's system for providing Braille instruction, it also focuses on the partially sighted child for whom there may be difficulty in determining the most appropriate reading medium, be it Braille, print, auditory, or a combination of these.

BRAILLE: AN OVERVIEW

Braille is a system of written communication utilized by the blind. Letters, numbers, and punctuation are represented through combinations of six raised dots that are tactually distinguishable by the fingers. The basic unit in this system is the Braille cell composed of spaces for the six raised dots.

Braille was first developed in the late 1820's by Louis Braille, a blind Frenchman, who was seeking an improved method for writing and reading. The coding system he discovered, and modified, was based on the tactile "Ecriture Nocturne" (night writing) code invented by Charles Barbier for sending military messages that could be read on the battlefield at night, without light.

Braille Codes

Since its inception, there have been many improvements and refinements of Braille both in America and abroad. Five major Braille codes are used in America:

1. Literary Braille: used for writing and reading literature.
2. Nemeth Braille: used for mathematical and scientific work.
3. Music Braille: used for music notation.
4. Computer Braille: used for representing ASCII code.
5. Textbook Braille: used for school textbooks.

Literary Braille, is further refined into three "Grades":

Grade 1 Braille is a one-to-one representation of letters, numbers, and punctuation.

Grade 2 Braille is a more advanced code which employs contractions to represent words. For example the Grade 2 contraction of the word "from" is represented by the Braille letter "f".

Grade 3 Braille is a more contracted form of Braille which is used for fast notetaking.

Writing Braille

Braille can be written with several devices:

The mechanical Braillewriter. This device typically has seven keys, one key for each dot position, plus one "spacer" key. After Braille paper is inserted into the machine, the student pushes the proper keys to produce one Braille cell. The cells are formed from left to right and are produced mechanically by small pins pushing up from the underside of the Braille paper. The mechanical Braillewriter would be the equivalent of a mechanical typewriter.

The slate and stylus. These two instruments are used together for taking notes by hand. The slate is a template used to guide the formation of the raised dot cells. The stylus is a punch that looks like a small awl and is used to punch the dots into the paper, guided by the slate. With this method, the Braille cells are Brailled by hand, one dot and one cell at a time. The Braillist makes the notes backwards by going from right to left and forming the Braille cells backwards. To read this Braille, the paper is turned over, so that the dots are raised and in the normal reading configuration going from left to right. This method can be used for taking notes and is similar to using a pencil and paper.

The electronic, or paperless, Braillewriter. With advances in computer technology, devices have been invented to store Braille electronically on magnetic tape. Electronic Braillewriters also have seven keys that are used to produce the Braille cells magnetically on the tape. To read Braille from the tape, the Braille cells are reproduced on a display that is typically comprised of a strip of fifteen mechanical Braille cells. In each cell, short, metal pins are electronically elevated to represent the raised dots. As the information on the tape is read, it displays fifteen characters. When finished reading one line, the reader presses a bar at the end of the display, and the entire display changes to bring up the next fifteen Braille cells from the tape.

Production of Braille Textbooks and Instructional Material

Braille material is provided to Virginia's students via several means. Materials such as teacher-made tests or worksheets developed in local school divisions are transcribed into Braille by the Vision Teacher who is employed by that division.

Braille textbooks are loaned by the Department for the Visually Handicapped's Instructional Materials and Resource Center (Resource Center) to school divisions whenever they enroll a child who needs books in Braille. When that student is finished with the textbook, it is returned to the Resource Center where it can be loaned to other school divisions.

The Resource Center either obtains the Braille textbooks from the American Printing House for the Blind (APH) or from a Resource Center in another state. If unavailable from either of these two sources, the book is transcribed into Braille at the Resource Center. Until recently, most Braille textbooks were produced by APH or by volunteer Braille transcribers; school divisions had to use whatever was available from these sources. Both had a limited production capacity and could not accommodate individual state school systems or school divisions. However, when visually handicapped children moved into the mainstream of public education, they needed the textbooks used at their grade level in the school they attended. With advances in computer technology, affordable Braille printer hardware and Braille transcription software has been developed so that Braille textbooks can be easily produced, reproduced and updated. Using this technology, the Resource Center supplies Virginia's Braille students with the textbooks they need to participate in the public school classes.

An average Braille textbook is 10 volumes with one volume being 75 to 80 pages. To satisfy the need for Braille textbooks, the Resource Center employs two professional Braille transcribers and uses 50 additional "volunteer" Braille transcribers.

During FY 1990, the Resource Center supplied Braille textbooks and material to 65 students. During that time, the Resource Center loaned 742 Braille textbooks to school divisions; 85 of which were transcribed by the professional and volunteer "transcribers."

Teachers of the Visually Impaired

Teachers of the Visually Impaired must meet state teacher certification requirements that include the following:

1. language development;
2. anatomy, physiology, and diseases of the eye;
3. reading and writing Braille;
4. procedures for teaching visually impaired individuals;
5. student teaching with the visually impaired (or one year of successfully teaching the visually impaired).

(Certification Regulations for Teachers, 1986)

The Department of Education is in the process of revising its teacher certification regulations. In order to ensure that Braille is taught by qualified teachers who have the knowledge to provide comprehensive Braille instruction, the proposed Visually Impairment Endorsement Requirements include expanded criteria for Braille. The teacher will have to have completed coursework in:

> "g. teaching reading and writing of grade 2 Braille on both a Braille writer and a "slate and stylus", and knowledge of other codes, to include Nemeth, music code, computer Braille;"
>
> (Revision of Certification Regulations, Proposal for Special Education - DRAFT; February 1990)

By taking a Braille course and meeting Virginia's certification requirements, it is assumed that these teachers possess the knowledge and skills to make them proficient in Braille.

During the 1989-90 school year, 115 of Virginia's 138 school divisions were served by 84.6 F.T.E. (full time equivalent) Vision Teachers. The 23 school divisions that did not have the services of a Teacher of the Visually Impaired either did not have children who needed Braille instruction, or they purchased services from the Department for the Visually Handicapped, which employs an additional 15 Teachers of the Visually Impaired.

While teachers reported in the surveys that they are proficient in Braille, many would like additional training in how to teach Braille. In some cases, teachers who do not actively teach Braille to students feel less proficient in their own use of Braille. In order to remain proficient in their Braille skills, both teachers and students must use it.

In addition, it is one thing to know Braille and quite another to know how to teach it. It is also quite different to teach Braille to a person who already knows how to read and write (an adult for example), and to teach Braille to a child who is learning to read and write at the same time he is learning the Braille code.

Virginia's Braille Instruction Delivery System

The Code of Virginia, Section 22.1-217, (Appendix C) specifies that services to children with visual disabilities in public schools is the joint responsibility of the State Board of Education, the local school boards, and the Department for the Visually Handicapped.

To implement this mandate, the Departments of Education and Visually Handicapped work under an interagency agreement, which establishes specific responsibilities for each agency and the public schools. The agreement specifies that school divisions are responsible for providing Braille instruction to children who need it. School divisions, therefore hire certified Teachers of the Visually Impaired to provide vision-related services to their visually impaired children and to consult with other school personnel. If there is a student who needs Braille instruction, it is the responsibility of the Vision Teacher to provide it. The agreement further specifies that school divisions which do not employ a Vision Teacher (VT) or school divisions which have a vacant VT position may purchase Braille instruction from the Department for the Visually Handicapped (DVH) if DVH staff are available. In addition, if the IEP committee determines that a student needs a more concentrated program of Braille instruction, that student can be placed in one of the two state residential schools for the blind, either the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind at Staunton or the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind at Hampton.

A child with no additional handicaps who needs to learn Braille will usually receive pre-Braille instruction in preschool or kindergarten and learn Braille in kindergarten through fourth grade; this parallels the pattern for learning print. During this period of pre-Braille and initial Braille instruction, it is important that the child receive instruction on a daily basis. Once the student acquires the Braille skills, the time required for Braille instruction can be eliminated.

Nemeth Code is introduced when the student begins to learn higher math; music and computer codes are introduced if and when the student needs it.

FUNCTIONAL VISION

To determine which students need to learn Braille, one needs to understand how they use their vision. For the totally blind, this has no relevance, but for the student who has some vision, the educators, parents, and student, must determine how he "functionally" uses his vision before planning an individual program of instruction.

Acuity

Visual acuity tests are standardized tests used by eye care practitioners to determine visual discrimination of a specific target at a given distance. It is a clinical measure of how a person sees in a particular examining room, on a given day, and under the lighting conditions of that room. This measurement is valuable to doctors when determining refraction and plotting pathology of eye disease.

The acuity with which people are most familiar is "distance" acuity. It is usually taken at a distance of 20 feet, and records how well an individual sees at that distance compared to the average person. For example, 20/20 indicates that the patient sees as well as the average person and 20/200 indicates that the patient must be 20 feet from an object to see the detail that the average person sees at 200 feet.

Distance acuity is useful information in determining how to teach a child Orientation and Mobility skills so that he can travel independently in the community.

The Code of Virginia, Sections 63.1-142 and 63.1-166, uses the following distance acuity definition "blind person" (ie: legally blind):

> "'Blind person' means a person having not better than 20/200 central vision acuity in the better eye measured at twenty feet with correcting lenses or having visual acuity greater than 20/200 but with the widest diameter of the visual field in the better eye subtending an angle of no greater than

twenty degrees, measured at a distance of thirty-three centimeters using a three-millimeter white test object, or a Goldman III-4e target, or other equivalent equipment. Such blindness shall be certified by a duly licensed physician or optometrist."

In January 1990, Virginia listed 822 legally blind school-age children in its annual report to the American Printing House for the Blind.

The acuity information that is important in determining what medium a person should read, is the "near point" acuity. Near point acuity is taken at the normal reading distance of 16 inches and often differs from the distance acuity. There are many highly myopic (near sighted) individuals who are legally blind, in that, with best correction, they cannot read anything better than the 20/200 line on the Eye Chart at 20 feet; however, they can read regular size print at a distance of 10 - 16 inches.

Acuity should not be the only piece of information used, but rather it should be one of several pieces of information to consider when planning a student's Individualized Education Program. This is borne out in the survey responses in which the majority of respondents disagreed with the idea that "all" legally blind children should receive Braille instruction.

Functional Vision

Like other children, those with visual disabilities have different and unique strengths and needs resulting from their individual situations. For all children, different family situations, living conditions, and motivation form patterns of independence and expectations. For the child with a visual disability, there is the additional problem of reduced vision and how that affects his functional abilities and independence. A child's "functional vision" indicates how he uses his remaining vision in different situations.

The manner in which children with visual disabilities use their remaining vision depends on many factors, including the age of onset, the etiology of the eye problem, the characteristics of the eye problem, the student's reaction to different lighting conditions, and how they see at different distances. A child's vision may be stable, unstable, or progressively deteriorating. In addition, a child's ability to function depends on individual needs, sensory preference (visual, tactual, or auditory), family situation and motivation. Consequently, children with similar eye conditions or visual acuities may function entirely differently. For example, after assessing children individually, an IEP committee could decide that some should read with Braille and that others should read with print.

For educational purposes, therefore, it is important to consider how a student uses his "functional" vision.

This is reflected in both the state and federal educational definition of "Visually Impaired". Both the state's Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Handicapped Children and Youth in Virginia and the federal regulations, Code of Federal Regulations, 34 CFR 300.5(b)(11), use a functional definition:

> "Visually Impaired" means a visual impairment which, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes both partially sighted and blind children.

As late as the 1960's, many children with partial vision were required to learn Braille. Some of these children could read the Braille cells visually from arm's length. To discourage using their vision, these children wore wide paper collars to prevent them from scanning their Braille. (Margaret Tomasik, Low Vision Coordinator, DVH, Personal Comment, 8-20-90). However, through research, it was demonstrated that children could use their vision without harm and that many could be taught to use it more effectively.

PROCESS FOR DETERMINING A CHILD'S READING AND WRITING MEDIUM

As with all handicapped children, Virginia's school divisions use the state-mandated Individualized Education Program (IEP) planning process to develop programs and services for handicapped children. The IEP process is, therefore, used to determine if a child with visual disabilities needs Braille, print, or auditory instruction or a combination of these. No one "formal" assessment can be used to determine the kind of instruction needed; however, there are several assessments which, when considered collectively, provide an indication of the child's literacy needs. These assessments provide information about the student's tactual or visual preference, visual and tactual efficiency, reading rate, psychological functioning, and functional vision.

The IEP committee is a planing team with a minimum membership of the child's parent(s), the special program educator(s), and an administrator. They should consider a variety of evaluations and observation reports in order to determine if the child needs to learn Braille. The committee should consider the student's visual and tactual efficiency and preference, eye condition, prognosis, and any additional handicaps. Examples of questions the committee should be asking are:

- How does the child explore his environment?
- Does the child prefer to work tactually or visually?
- Does the child look at pictures?
- Is the child progressing along with his classmates using the visual and/or tactual senses?
- Can the child read his name visually with print and/or tactually with Braille?

These are not one-time assessments nor is it a single planning process, but rather an ongoing approach to evaluating the child and modifying his educational program as appropriate. At a minimum, the child's IEP is re-evaluated annually.

The process encourages changing a child's primary reading and writing medium as the child's situation, eye condition, environment, strengths and needs change. It also encourages the use of all three skills; Braille, print, and auditory skills. In the survey responses, Vision Teachers reported instances where they taught children to read and write using both Braille and print; the surveys indicate at least 23 students have received this dual training. A student who can benefit from this dual system, should receive the proper instruction. When considering the question of dual training, the IEP committee must decide when the training should occur and how much time will be spent learning both systems, since to learn both systems will require additional time that may be taken from other educational endeavors.

Students with skills in both systems have more flexibility in accessing his community, and would structure the use to the situation. For example, it would be possible for a partially sighted, legally blind student to read a Braille literature book, a print math book with the aid of a hand-held magnifier, and watch a baseball game with a telescope. The student would know how and when to use each of these mediums.

Statutory Provisions

Both the Code of Virginia, Section 22.1-213 and the Code of Federal Regulations, 34 CFR 300.14, require all school divisions to offer educational programs and related services to "handicapped children" through a program of "special education".

The IEP process, itself, provides the framework for determining the best method(s) by which a student with a visual disability can read and write. If a student requires Braille to benefit from a program of special education, then Braille would be a related service, and must be available as a part of a school division's special education program.

These same state and federal regulations require school divisions to offer Braille instruction as part of their special education programs if a visually handicapped child needs it.

AREAS OF CONCERN

Decline in use of Braille

For many individuals with visual disabilities, Braille is one of the methods they need to use to read and write; i.e., to be literate. Over the past 25 years, there has been a significant decrease nationally in the number of students who read Braille. This has been documented by both consumer organizations and educators through the annual reports of Braille use by the American Printing House for the Blind (APH).

Using the information that Virginia provided to APH for the past four years, we can see the reading trends in the public schools of the Commonwealth. When compared with the total number of legally blind students, the percent of Braille readers remained constant, however, there was a five percent decrease in the number of visual readers and a seven percent decrease in the number of auditory readers.

Figure 1
Primary Reading Media of Legally Blind Public School Students in Virginia

	1987	1988	1989	1990
Auditory Readers	96 (12%)	76 (9%)	57 (7%)	44 (5%)
Braille Readers	67 (9%)	66 (8%)	71 (9%)	72 (9%)
Nonreaders	217 (28%)	256 (32%)	300 (36%)	266 (33%)
Prereaders	42 (5%)	58 (7%)	52 (6%)	96 (12%)
Visual Readers	366 (46%)	351 (44%)	345 (42%)	338 (41%)
Total	788	807	825	816

(American Printing House for the Blind; Federal Quota Registration of Eligible Students; 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990)

Several theories for the national decline have been encapsulated by Dr. Susan J. Spungin, Associate Executive Director for Program Services at the American Foundation for the Blind:

1. **Medical advances have permitted more children with multiple handicaps to survive. These children may not have the mental capacity to learn either Braille or print.**

   According to the Department for the Visually Handicapped's FY 1989-90 Year-End Report, forty-seven percent of Virginia's children with visual disabilities have multiple handicaps. While some of these children could not learn to read or write using either Braille or print, there are others who could benefit for one or both methods.

2. **There has been increased research into the use of vision and how this functional use can be maximized.**

The result of this research could be having a "pendulum" effect. Once researchers began to demonstrate that children with partial vision could read print, vision professionals began to implement the findings. As the pendulum began to swing away from the mandatory use of Braille, more emphasis was placed on using remaining vision.

For example, over the past fifteen years, the Department for the Visually Handicapped has offered many workshops devoted to the assessment and use of "functional" vision and comparatively few devoted to Braille.

3. **Braille is considered to be a "second class" system when it is compared with sighted reading.**

Rather than "second class" system, some educators may consider Braille a "second choice" system.

Along with the research into use of vision and the subsequent increased emphasis for children to use their vision as much as possible, came changes in programming for partially sighted children. Part of the emphasis on using vision may also be because there are many more educational materials, textbooks, and novels available in print than in Braille.

4. **There has been a decrease in emphasis on teaching Braille in teacher preparation programs.**

There is speculation by some educators and consumers that the "pendulum" may have swung too far toward stressing the use of vision, and that teachers may not be adequately considering Braille during the IEP process. Colleges and universities may be placing less emphasis on teaching Braille, while they place more emphasis on use of functional vision.

Through its teacher certification requirements, Virginia mandates that Teachers of the Visually Impaired must have at least one Braille course and know how to teach Braille. As mentioned earlier, the Board of Education is in the process of expanding the

Braille criteria for Teachers of the Visually Impaired endorsement.

According to survey responses, Teachers of the Visually Impaired felt they needed additional or refresher courses in the following areas:

	Area of Concentration	Percent Wishing Additional Training
1.	Computer Braille:	75%
2.	Grade 3 Braille:	71%
3.	Electronic Braille:	63%
4.	Nemeth Code:	57%
5.	Music Code:	55%
6.	Slate and Stylus:	24%
7.	Grade 2 Braille:	10%

5. **The Education of the Handicapped (EHA) (Public Law 94-142) regulations have broken down and are not being followed by educators.**

There is concern that IEP committees may not be considering the whole child, and may be planning for the child to read print exclusively, even when it is clear that the child uses this method slowly and with little comprehension.

Both in the surveys and at the public hearing, there were anecdotal reports that there are children in Virginia who could benefit from Braille instruction, but who are not receiving such instruction. The major portion of this testimony is general in nature with individuals saying that they "know of children who need Braille, but who are not receiving it." Through the survey responses, two Teachers of the Visually Impaired reported knowing a child who needed Braille instruction, but was not receiving it. One added the comment that the student who needed Braille was fighting the process. Two administrators of special education reported that each of them knew of one student who needed Braille, but who was not receiving it. One reported a preschool child who would be enrolled in the State School for the Deaf and Blind within a year. The other reported a child who was identified last year, and who would be receiving assistance in kindergarten during the 1990-91 school year.

This testimony from the public hearings and

the surveys indicates that there may be several children who need Braille instruction but are not receiving it and that IEP teams may not be considering all instructional possibilities before making their plans.

Another way to evaluate IEP committee decisions concerning Braille instruction is to review the number of due process hearings or complaints filed with both the Department of Education (DOE) and the Department for Rights of Virginians with Disabilities (DRVD). According to Dr. Judith Barnhiser, Associate Director of Complaints Management at DOE, there have been no due process proceedings or complaints concerning this issue. Similarly, according to Mr. Philip Barr, Deputy Director for Dispute Resolution at DRVD, during the past four years there have not been any complaints concerning this issue.

There is a strong indication that Braille services in the Commonwealth will be improved if Guidelines for Educational Programs for Students with Visual Disabilities are developed. These Guidelines will be important to ensure that planning is being conducted by well informed IEP committees.

6. **The Braille code is so complex that it is hard to learn.**

While there have been changes in the Braille code, these changes have not substantially increased the complexity of the code.

7. **The existing programs in the schools are such that children are being served by Vision Teachers, rather than receiving training in self-contained classes, resource rooms, or residential facilities.**

For Virginia, the issue is not only who teaches Braille or where Braille is taught, but also the amount of time devoted to teaching Braille. Are students receiving the amount of Braille instruction that they need?

8. **As technology has advanced, children with visual disabilities are depending more on tape recorded material and speech output devices.**

In Virginia, children with visual disabilities are taught how to use both tape recorded material and speech output devices in order to

supplement their Brailled material and to have access to computer technology.

There is no consensus that any of these theories is the cause for the decrease in Braille use, nor is there consensus that this list is complete or accurate; there is no scientific research to support any of these theories.

The decrease in Braille use is a national issue that is being considered by consumers, educators, and administrators. Determining who should receive Braille versus print versus auditory instruction is a volatile and emotion-charged issue. It is being considered and studied by national task forces and committees and being reported at national conferences of educators and consumers.

In the survey response from Texas Tech University, A.J. Koenig reported their attempt to formalize an assessment process that will provide better data when considering the reading medium or mediums students should use.

A committee of experts in the field of education of children with visual disabilities is meeting in an attempt to develop a set of guidelines to assist teachers of the visually impaired in selecting the appropriate learning media for their students. At their first meeting, the group developed as their working philosophy: "Education implies equal access to information." Not only is it important for students to be literate in the medium(s) that they will use, but greater efforts must be made to produce more and better Braille textbooks, novels, restaurant menus, etc. (Hilda Caton; Guidelines for Literacy; Presentation at the Association of Rehabilitation and Education of the Blind and Visually Impaired Annual Convention; July 1990)

In its testimony at the public hearing, the American Foundation for the Blind reported that it has asked the Library of Congress' Division of the Blind and Physically Handicapped to develop and administer a national standardized Braille competency program for teachers and parents of children with visual disabilities.

In Virginia, it is apparent that there is a need for Guidelines for Educational Programs for the Visually Impaired to assist the IEP committee in formulating the Individualized Education Program for children with visual disabilities.

<u>Braille Instruction as a Viable Method of Promoting Literacy Among All Blind and Visually Handicapped Students.</u>

For some children with visual disabilities, Braille is the only method they can use to read and write; therefore, for these children, Braille is the only method for attaining literacy. For children whose remaining vision permits them to read either large print or regular print with speed and comprehension, Braille is not a viable method of literacy. Some children will need to know how

to read and write using both Braille and print; they must learn to choose the best method in each situation. Hence, Braille is a viable method of literacy for some children with visual disabilities, but not all such children.

Concurrent Increases in Cost Associated With Such Instruction.
Both state Special Education regulations and federal Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA) regulations mandate that special education and related services must be provided to handicapped children, regardless of the cost to school divisions.

However, it is also important to assess increases in cost associated with this issue in order to accurately plan for any projected increases in expenditures.

The amount of time devoted to teaching a student Braille is determined by the IEP committee and reflected in the Individualized Education Plan. This study did not collect data on the amount of instructional time devoted to Braille instruction, so there remains an unanswered question: Do students receive as much Braille instruction as they need? To determine this, the Department of Education and the Department for the Visually Handicapped propose to examine the IEP's of all children who receive Braille instruction during the 1990-91 school year. If it is determined that students should receive more Braille instruction, then there would likely be an increase in cost to the state and the localities.

Decrease in the Number of Colleges and Universities Preparing Teachers of the Visually Impaired
One reason why the decrease in Braille use is a national issue is that there is also a national shortage of Teachers of the Visually Impaired to provide Braille instruction. The shortage of teachers is in part due to a decrease in the number of teacher preparation programs and an increase in the demand for teachers due to the requirements of the Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA) (P.L. 94-142).

This scenario has proven true in Virginia, as the teacher preparation program for Teachers of the Visually Impaired at the University of Virginia was eliminated in August, 1984.

In Virginia, during the 1989-90 school year there were 90.6 Itinerant Vision Teachers positions; 6 of those positions remained vacant for the entire school year. Of the 84.6 teachers employed during the 1989-90 school year, 79.5 were certified in Virginia as Teachers of the Visually Impaired, 5.1 were unendorsed and employed with a "waiver" from the Department of Education, and one was unendorsed and teaching without a waiver. A waiver is granted only if the unendorsed teacher takes six credit hours of college-level coursework each year in the area of the desired endorsement.

To fill the void created by the demise of the University of Virginia's teacher preparation program, Department for the Visually Handicapped staff, working with University of Virginia Continuing Education staff, developed coursework to meet the requirements for a Teacher of the Visually Impaired. This system has permitted several teachers to take coursework toward endoresment in that field. The disadvantage of this approach is that the teachers do not have a full-time faculty, and must depend on out-of-state teachers to provide instruction. There is a critical need to establish an approved teacher preparation program at one of Virginia's colleges or universities. This program could then supply the teacher needs of Virginia, and provide continuing education on a consistent basis.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the study found that:

1. Current state Special Education regulations and federal EHA regulations mandate school divisions to offer Braille instruction if there are students who need it. These same regulations require school divisions to provide Braille instruction if it is in a child's Individualized Education Program (IEP). No further regulation is necessary.

2. While Braille is a viable method of promoting literacy among "some" blind and visually handicapped students, it is by no means a viable method for "all" students with visual disabilities.

3. There is disagreement among blind individuals themselves, and parents, consumer groups, teachers, school administrators, and college and university professors concerning who needs Braille instruction. However, for the most part, there is general agreement that the student must be viewed as an individual and that his IEP must be developed on the basis of strengths and needs. Survey responses indicate that, as a child's vision becomes worse, there is a greater need to use Braille. These same surveys indicate even greater support for teaching Braille to children who have a progressive eye disease.

4. No single evaluation can be used to determine if a child needs to receive Braille instruction. However, there are numerous evaluations which, when considered together, indicate whether or not a child needs to learn to read and write using Braille, print, or auditory means or a combination of these. Since there are no formal assessments to determine if a child needs Braille, the decision is based on the deliberation of the IEP committee.

5. While there were reports in both the surveys and at the public hearing of children who need Braille instruction and are not receiving it, it was also reported that two of the four cases mentioned were going to receive Braille instruction during the 1990-91 school year, and one was having difficulty accepting Braille as the primary reading medium.

   In addition, there are no records of any complaints having been made to either the Department of Education's (DOE) Office of Assessment and Compliance or the Department for Rights of Virginians with Disabilities (DRVD).

   With the uncertainty surrounding the anecdotal reports, there may be children who need Braille instruction, but who are not receiving it. If this is true, the problem is not pervasive, since neither DOE or DRVD has received any complaints.

6. The Education of the Handicapped Act (Public Law 94-142) requires educators to consider every child as an individual with unique strengths and needs. Therefore, when the IEP committee develops programs for children with disabilities, the members consider the information that relates to each individual child; a specific service should not be mandated for an entire class or group of children.

7. Virginia's school divisions can provide Braille instruction through several options:
   a. They can hire a Teacher of the Visually Impaired.
   b. Purchase services from a neighboring school division that employs a Teacher of the Visually Impaired.
   c. Enter into a regional program arrangement with other school divisions to hire a Teacher of the Visually Impaired.
   d. Purchase the services from the Department for the Visually Handicapped.
   e. Send the child to one of the state Schools for the Deaf and Blind.

8. There are vacant positions for Teachers of the Visually Impaired in both the school divisions and in the Department for the Visually Handicapped. This is, in part, due to a national decrease in the number of teacher preparation programs. The state does not have a college or university with an "approved program" for Teachers of the Visually Impaired and, in fact, eliminated one in 1984.

9. There is an unresolved question: "Is Braille instruction being provided in the quantity that it is needed?"

10. The cost associated with improving Braille instruction will be those expenditures associated with developing workshops and a college program to prepare Teachers of the Visually Impaired. However, if the examination of IEP's reveals that children need more intense programs of Braille instruction, there is likely to be additional costs associated with hiring more teachers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Braille instruction should not be mandated for the entire population of blind and visually impaired children.

2. The Board of Education should not promulgate additional regulations that require Braille instruction to be offered in public school special education programs. This requirement is already stipulated in both state (State Special Education Regulations) and federal regulations (Education of the Handicapped Act - Public Law 99-142).

3. The Board of Education and the Board for the Department for the Visually Handicapped should develop a policy statement that stresses the importance of offering Braille instruction by qualified teachers to meet the needs of students. The statement should encourage teaching the Slate and Stylus, Literary Braille Grades 2 and 3, Nemeth Code, Music Code, and Computer Code to all who need it.

4. The Department of Education, in cooperation with the Department for the Visually Handicapped, should develop and disseminate Guidelines for Educational Programs for the Visually Impaired. A key component of these Guidelines should be a section on Braille instruction. This section should delineate evaluation instruments to use and a process to ensure that school personnel, parents, and students consider all appropriate aspects of the student's functioning as they determine the need for Braille, print or auditory instruction, or any combination of these. These Guidelines should be disseminated during the 1991-92 school year.

5. The Department of Education and the Department for the Visually Handicapped with input from consumer and professional organizations, should develop workshops, inservice programs and college courses that will promote the use of Braille and provide a forum for upgrading teachers' skills.

6. The State Council of Higher Education in Virginia, the Department of Education, the Department for the Visually Impaired, and the Schools for the Deaf and Blind should cooperatively seek to develop an "approved" Teacher of the Visually Handicapped teacher preparation program through one of Virginia's colleges or universities.

7. The Department of Education and the Department for the Visually Handicapped should develop a method for ensuring that all Teachers of the Visually Impaired are competent and have the ability to teach Braille.

8. The Department of Education and the Department for the Visually Handicapped should develop a process that monitors the progress of students who are learning Braille.

9. The Department for the Visually Handicapped, with cooperation from the Department of Education, should develop a Braille awareness program that can be used in Virginia to educate school personnel, parents and the public about the use of Braille and the need to provide public information in Braille.

10. The Department of Education and the Department for the Visually Handicapped should review the IEP's of all students who are receiving Braille instruction to determine if the amount of instructional time is adequate.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIXES

A. SJR 36
B. HJR 74
C. Code of Virginia, Section 22.1-217
D. Survey - Vision Teachers
E. Survey - Directors of Special Education
F. Survey - Institutes of Higher Education
G. Survey - State Education Consultants for Visually Handicapped Children
H. Survey - Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped Advisory Committee
I. Summary of Surveys
J. Position Statement: American Foundation for the Blind
K. Position Statement: Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired
L. Position Statement: Central Virginia Council of the Blind
M. Position Statement: National Federation of the Blind of Virginia
N. Position Statement: Old Dominion Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired
O. Position Statement: Richmond Area Federation of the Blind
P. Notice of Public Hearing
Q. Virginia Register - Notice of Public Hearing
R. Braille: What is it? What does it mean to the blind?
S. Summary of Public Comments
T. Position Statement: Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind Advisory Committee

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 36

Requesting the Board of Education to study the need to require school divisions to offer Braille instruction in their special education programs and, in cooperation with the Department for the Visually Handicapped, to evaluate the role of Braille instruction as a viable method of promoting literacy among all blind and visually handicapped students in the Commonwealth.

Agreed to by the Senate, March 9, 1990
Agreed by the House of Delegates, March 7, 1990

WHEREAS, Braille is a vital tool for literacy, communication, and independence for legally blind persons, and literacy for all Virginians is a high priority goal for the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, it is important that the visually handicapped be given every opportunity to gain literacy, which will enable them to become more independent; and

WHEREAS, because Braille instruction may not be offered as an alternative technique in the education of legally blind students in all schools, many students who might gain from Braille instruction do not have this benefit required in their Individualized Education Programs (IEP), often to their detriment in later life; and

WHEREAS, it is vital that children with progressive degenerative eye disease be taught to read Braille since they eventually will be unable to read large print; and

WHEREAS, quality programs for Braille instruction require competent and well-trained itinerant vision teachers who are capable of teaching all levels of Braille; and

WHEREAS, it is important that legally blind children be provided an opportunity to gain literacy, and Braille instruction can be an effective tool in this regard; and

WHEREAS, the implementation of regulations to require local school divisions to offer Braille instruction for legally blind students would assist many of these students toward literacy, self-sufficiency, and productive lives; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Board of Education is requested to study the need to require school divisions to offer Braille instruction in their special education programs, and in cooperation with the Department for the Visually Handicapped, evaluate the role of Braille instruction as a viable method of promoting literacy among all blind and visually handicapped students in the Commonwealth. The Board shall determine (i) the number of blind students who could benefit from Braille instruction but who do not currently receive such instruction, (ii) the appropriateness of requiring Braille instruction to be offered to such students according to their IEP, and (iii) evaluate the concurrent increases in cost associated with such instruction. The Board shall determine the need to promulgate regulations to require that Braille instruction be offered in the special education programs, and the need for instructional and administrative organization, instructional and support personnel, pre-service and in-service training, and resources to support the implementation of any recommendations.

The Board shall ensure the participation of the Department for the Visually Handicapped, experts in Braille instruction and the education of legally blind children, and parents and advocates for such children in the planning and development of the study.

All agencies of the Commonwealth shall cooperate with the Board and Department to provide assistance for this study as appropriate.

The Board shall complete its work in time to submit its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the 1991 Session of the General Assembly as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for processing legislative documents.

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 74

AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE

(Proposed by the House Committee on Rules
on February 6, 1990)

(Patron Prior to Substitute--Delegate Van Landingham)

Requesting the Board of Education to study the need to require school divisions to offer Braille instruction in their special education programs and, in cooperation with the Department for the Visually Handicapped, to evaluate the role of Braille instruction as a viable method of promoting literacy among all blind and visually handicapped students in the Commonwealth.

WHEREAS, Braille is a vital tool for literacy, communication, and independence for legally blind persons, and literacy for all Virginians is a high priority goal for the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, it is important that the visually handicapped be given every opportunity to gain literacy, which will enable them to become more independent; and

WHEREAS, because Braille instruction may not be offered as an alternative technique in the education of legally blind students in all schools, many students who might gain from Braille instruction do not have this benefit required in their Individualized Education Programs (IEP), often to their detriment in later life; and

WHEREAS, it is vital that children with progressive degenerative eye disease be taught to read Braille since they eventually will be unable to read large print; and

WHEREAS, quality programs for Braille instruction require competent and well-trained itinerant vision teachers who are capable of teaching all levels of Braille; and

WHEREAS, it is important that legally blind children be provided an opportunity to gain literacy, and Braille instruction can be an effective tool in this regard; and

WHEREAS, the implementation of regulations to require local school divisions to offer Braille instruction for legally blind students would assist many of these students toward literacy, self-sufficiency, and productive lives; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Board of Education is requested to study the need to require school divisions to offer Braille instruction in their special education programs, and in cooperation with the Department for the Visually Handicapped, evaluate the role of Braille instruction as a viable method of promoting literacy among all blind and visually handicapped students in the Commonwealth. The Board shall determine (i) the number of blind students who could benefit from Braille instruction but who do not currently receive such instruction, (ii) the appropriateness of requiring Braille instruction to be offered to such students according to their IEP, and (iii) evaluate the concurrent increases in cost associated with such instruction. The Board shall determine the need to promulgate regulations to require that Braille instruction be offered in the special education programs, and the need for instructional and administrative organization, instructional and support personnel, pre-service and in-service training, and resources to support the implementation of any recommendations.

The Board shall ensure the participation of the Department for the Visually Handicapped, experts in Braille instruction and the education of legally blind children, and parents and advocates for such children in the planning and development of the study.

All agencies of the Commonwealth shall cooperate with the Board and Department to provide assistance for this study as appropriate.

The Board shall complete its work in time to submit its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the 1991 Session of the General Assembly as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for processing legislative documents.

1990 SESSION

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY - CHAPTER 203

An Act to amend and reenact § 22.1-217 of the Code of Virginia, relating to visually impaired children.

[H 1127]

Approved APR 9 1990

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That § 22.1-217 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 22.1-217. Visually impaired children.—A. Special education for visually impaired children provided by a school division shall be established, maintained and operated jointly by the school board and the Virginia Board for the Visually Handicapped subject to the regulations of the Board of Education. *Consideration shall be given to including Braille instruction in the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP), whenever appropriate.*

B. The Virginia Board for the Visually Handicapped shall prepare and place in operation a program of special education services in addition to the special education provided in the public school system designed to meet the educational needs of visually impaired children between the ages of birth and twenty-one and may prepare and place in operation such programs for such individuals of other ages. In the development of such a program, the Virginia Board for the Visually Handicapped shall cooperate with the Board of Education and the school boards of the several school divisions.

C. As used in this section:

1. "Visually impaired" shall be defined by the Board of Education and the Virginia Board for the Visually Handicapped.

2. "Program" means a modified program which provides special materials or services and may include the employment of itinerant teachers or resource room teachers for the visually impaired.

_____

President of the Senate

_____

Speaker of the House of Delegates

Approved:

_____

Governor

APPENDIX D

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
AND
DEPARTMENT FOR THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED

June 1, 1990

TO: Itinerant Vision Teachers

FROM: Lissa Power Cluver, Associate Director
Special Education Program Services

Glen Slonneger, Supervisor
Programs for the Visually Impaired

SUBJECT: Braille Literacy Study (Senate Joint Resolution No. 36)

The 1990 General Assembly requested Virginia's Board of Education, in cooperation with the Department for the Visually Handicapped, to study the need to require school divisions to offer Braille instruction in their special education programs. In addition, the study is to evaluate the role of Braille instruction as a viable method of promoting literacy among all blind and visually handicapped students in the Commonwealth. See attachment 1 "Senate Joint Resolution No. 36."

Specifically, the study resolution calls for the following:

1. Board of Education is to study the need to require school divisions to offer Braille instruction in their special education programs.

2. Board of Education is to evaluate the role of Braille instruction as a viable method of promoting literacy among all blind and visually handicapped students.

3. The Board shall:

   i) determine the number of blind students who could benefit from Braille instruction but who do not currently receive such instruction,

   ii) determine the appropriateness of requiring Braille instruction to be offered to such students according to their IEP, and

iii) evaluate the concurrent increases in cost associated with such instruction.

4. The Board shall determine the need:

i) to promulgate regulations to require Braille instruction to be offered in the special education programs.

ii) for instruction and administrative organization, instructional and support personnel, pre-service and in-service training, and resources to support the implementation of any recommendations.

One part of the study deals with the manner in which Braille is currently being provided. In order to gather the most accurate information, we need your assistance. Since you provide the direct instruction, and in many cases act as the child's case manager, you have the best knowledge of when and how Braille is currently being provided; this is reflected in survey questions 1 through 6.

Another part of the study requests information about the in-service training needs of current Braille teachers; this is reflected in survey questions 7 and 8.

As you can see from the text of the study resolution, the results could potentially affect the way in which Braille will be taught in Virginia. We urge you to complete the attached survey (Attachment 2) and return it to Glen Slonneger by **June 22** at the following address:

Glen Slonneger
Virginia Department for the Visually Handicapped
397 Azalea Ave
Richmond, VA 23227

In addition to gathering information from you through this survey, a public hearing on the study is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, July 10, 1990, at the Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind in Richmond, Virginia.

If you have questions, please contact Glen Slonneger in writing at the above address or by telephone at 804/371-3140.

ATTACHMENT 2

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
P.O. BOX 6Q
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA 23216

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 36 - SURVEY

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey; the information you furnish is essential for an accurate report to the General Assembly. Please complete and return by June 22.

If you have questions, or require additional information, call Glen Slonneger at 804\371-3140.

==========

NAME OF PERSON COMPLETING THIS SURVEY:_____

Please check, and complete, the following statement which most applies to you:

51 I am a teacher of children with visual disabilities; I am employed by:_____

___ I am a parent of a child with a visual disability; I live in the following county/city:_____

___ I am a person with a visual disability; I live in the following county/city:_____

___ Other; please specify:_____

1. In your opinion, what criteria should be considered when determining which children with visual disabilities need to receive Braille instruction?

(Check all that apply)

32 (63%) Formal Assessment
48 (94%) Informal Assessment, such as teacher observation
32 (63%) Acuity
3 (5%) All Legally Blind Children Should Receive Braille
4 (8%) All children with a visual acuity of 20/400 or worse
30 (59%) Progressive Eye Disease
30 (59%) Individual Education Program
15 (29%) At Parent's Request
18 (35%) Other (List):

Additional Comments:

2. If you use any formal evaluation to determine which children need to receive Braille, please list the title and publisher:

_____
_____
_____

3. Report the number of children, by school division, who receive Braille instruction from you.

SCHOOL DIVISION	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
	56

4. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	AGREE	DISAGREE
a. All Legally Blind children should receive Braille instruction.	1 (2%)	50 (98%)
b. All children with a visual acuity of 20/400 or worse should receive Braille instruction.	4 (8%)	45 (92%)
c. All children with Progressive Eye Disease should receive Braille instruction.	10 (20%)	40 (80%)

Additional Comments:

5. Do you know of any students who currently need Braille instruction, but who are not receiving it?

Circle one: YES - 2 NO - 49

Additional Comments:

6. Have you ever taught a child to use Braille in combination with large print or regular print/low vision aids? If yes, please give the combination, and the number of children you taught.

(Check and complete all that apply)

____ Braille & **LARGE PRINT** (#: 13)
____ Braille & **REGULAR PRINT WITH LOW VISION AID** (#: 8)
____ Braille & **REGULAR PRINT** (#: 2)
____ Braille & **AUDIO** (#: 38)
____ Braille & **OTHER** (Specify): _____ (#: 12)

Additional Comments:

7. I am proficient in teaching:

(Check all that apply):

45 (88%) Grade 2 Braille
1 (2%) Grade 3 Braille
24 (47%) Nemeth Code
4 (8%) Music Code
5 (10%) Computer Braille
11 (22%) Electronic/Paperless Braille
36 (71%) Slate and Stylus
7 (14%) Other:

Additional Comments:

8. I need additional training to teach:

(Check all that apply):

5 (10%) Grade 2 Braille
36 (71%) Grade 3 Braille
29 (57%) Nemeth Code
28 (55%) Music Code
38 (75%) Computer Braille
32 (63%) Electronic/Paperless Braille
12 (24%) Slate and Stylus
_____ Other:

Additional Comments:

9. After reviewing the text of the resolution (attachment 1), please provide any other comments which you feel would be relevant to the study.

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
AND
DEPARTMENT FOR THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED

July 10, 1990

TO: Directors of Special Education

FROM: Lissa Power Cluver, Associate Director
Special Education Program Services

Glen Slonneger, Supervisor
Programs for the Visually Impaired

SUBJECT: Braille Literacy Study (Senate Joint Resolution No. 36)

The 1990 General Assembly requested Virginia's Board of Education, in cooperation with the Department for the Visually Handicapped, to study the need to require school divisions to offer Braille instruction in their special education programs. In addition, the study is to evaluate the role of Braille instruction as a viable method of promoting literacy among all blind and visually handicapped students in the Commonwealth. See Attachment 1, "Senate Joint Resolution No. 36."

One part of the study deals with the manner in which Braille is currently being provided in the school divisions. In order to gather the most accurate information, we need your assistance.

As you can see from the text of the study resolution, the results could potentially affect the way in which Braille would be taught in Virginia. Please complete the attached six-question survey (Attachment 2) and return it to Glen Slonneger by July 27 at the following address:

Glen Slonneger
Virginia Department for the Visually Handicapped
397 Azalea Ave
Richmond, VA 23227

If you have questions, please contact Glen Slonneger in writing at the above address or by telephone at 804/371-3140.

Thank you.

ATTACHMENT 2

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
AND
DEPARTMENT FOR THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 36 - SURVEY
Administrators of Special Education

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey; the information you furnish is essential for an accurate report to the General Assembly. Please complete and return by July 27.

If you have questions, or require additional information, call Mr. Slonneger at 804\371-3140.

==========

NAME OF PERSON COMPLETING SURVEY: 79

Title: _____

SchoolDivision: _____

1. Does your school division offer Braille instruction as part of its special education program?

   Circle one: YES - 40 NO - 39

   Additional Comments:

2. How many children in your school division received Braille instruction during the 1989-90 school year?

   70

3. Do you know of any students who currently need Braille instruction, but who are not receiving it?

   Circle one: YES - 2 NO - 77

   Additional Comments:

4. What criteria should be considered when determining which children with visual disabilities need to receive Braille instruction?

(Check all that apply)

65 (82%)	Formal Assessment
40 (51%)	Informal Assessment, such as teacher observation
45 (57%)	Acuity
14 (18%)	All Legally Blind children should receive Braille
30 (38%)	All children with a visual acuity of 20/400 or worse
50 (63%)	Progressive Eye Disease
68 (85%)	Individual Education Program
14 (18%)	At Parent's Request
4 (5%)	Others (List):

Additional Comments:

5. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	AGREE	DISAGREE
a. All Legally Blind children should receive Braille instruction.	21 (28%)	55 (72%)
b. All children with a visual acuity of 20/400 or worse should receive Braille instruction.	34 (47%)	39 (53%)
c. All children with Progressive Eye Disease should receive Braille instruction.	38 (53%)	34 (47%)

Additional Comments:

6. After reviewing the text of the resolution (Attachment 1), please provide any other comments which you feel would be relevant to the study.

APPENDIX F

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
AND
DEPARTMENT FOR THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED

MEMORANDUM

TO: Coordinator
Vision Teacher Preparation Programs

FROM: Glen R. Slonneger, Supervisor
Programs for the Visually Impaired

DATE: July 13, 1990

SUBJECT: BRAILLE LITERACY

During the 1990 session of the Virginia General Assembly, both the Virginia Senate and House requested the State's Board of Education, in cooperation with the Department for the Visually Handicapped, to study the need to require school divisions to offer Braille instruction in their special education programs. In addition, the study is to evaluate the role of Braille instruction as a viable method of promoting literacy among all blind and visually handicapped students in the Commonwealth. See Attachment 1, "Senate Joint Resolution No. 36." As you can see from the text of the study resolution, the results could potentially affect the way Braille instruction would be offered in Virginia.

One aspect of the study is to determine when a child with a visual disability should receive Braille instruction.

Would you please take fifteen minutes to answer the enclosed five-question survey and return it to Mr. Slonneger by **August 1** at the following address:

Glen Slonneger
Virginia Department for the Visually Handicapped
397 Azalea Ave
Richmond, VA 23227

If there is anything that you wish to add to the survey, we would appreciate your comments.

If you do not know the answers to these questions, would you please refer this request to the person in your College or University who coordinates the Vision Program.

If you have questions, or require additional information, call Glen Slonneger at 804\371-3140.

Thank you.

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
AND
DEPARTMENT FOR THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED

BRAILLE LITERACY SURVEY
Institutes of Higher Education

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey; the information you furnish is essential for an accurate report to the Virginia General Assembly. Please return by August 1.

If you have questions, or require additional information, call Glen Slonneger at 804\371-3140.

==========

NAME OF PERSON COMPLETING THIS SURVEY: 11

Title: _____

College or University: _____

1. In your opinion, what criteria should be considered when determining which children with visual disabilities need to receive Braille instruction?

(Check all that apply)

6 (55%)	Formal Assessment
10 (91%)	Informal Assessment, such as teacher observation
3 (27%)	Acuity
0 (0%)	All Legally Blind children should receive Braille
2 (18%)	All children with a visual acuity of 20/400 or worse
7 (64%)	Progressive Eye Disease
11 (100%)	Individual Education Program
14 (36%)	At Parent's Request
5 (45%)	Other (List):

Additional Comments:

2. If you use any formal evaluation to determine which children need to receive Braille, please list the title and publisher:

THERE ARE NO FORMAL ASSESSMENTS - 10
NO RESPONSE - 0

3. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	AGREE	DISAGREE
a. All Legally Blind children should receive Braille instruction.	2 (18%)	9 (82%)
b. All children with a visual acuity of 20/400 or worse should receive Braille instruction.	4 (36%)	7 (64%)
c. All children with Progressive Eye Disease should receive Braille instruction.	3 (33%)	6 (67%)

Additional Comments:

4. How do you determine if a child with a visual disability needs to receive Braille instruction?

5. After reviewing the text of the resolution (Attachment 1), please provide any other comments which you feel would be relevant to the study.

APPENDIX G

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
AND
DEPARTMENT FOR THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED

MEMORANDUM

TO: State Education Consultants for Visually Handicapped Children

FROM: Glen R. Slonneger, Jr.

DATE: July 5, 1990

SUBJECT: BRAILLE INSTRUCTION

During the 1990 session of the Virginia General Assembly, both the Virginia Senate and House requested the state's Board of Education, in cooperation with the Department for the Visually Handicapped, to study the need to require school divisions to offer Braille instruction in their special education programs. In addition, the study is to evaluate the role of Braille instruction as a viable method of promoting literacy among all blind and visually handicapped students in the Commonwealth. See Attachment 1, "Senate Joint Resolution No. 36." As you can see from the text of the study resolution, the results could potentially affect the way Braille instruction will be offered in Virginia.

One part of the study is to ascertain how other states determine if a child with a visual disability is to receive Braille instruction. In addition, we would like to know if other states require certain children to receive this instruction.

Would you please take ten minutes to answer the enclosed seven-question survey and return it to Glen Slonneger by July 27 at the following address:

Glen Slonneger
Virginia Department for the Visually Handicapped
397 Azalea Ave
Richmond, VA 23227

If there is anything that you wish to add to the survey, we would appreciate your comments.

If you do not know the answers to these questions, would you please refer this request to the person in your state who regularly deals with delivering services to visually handicapped children.

If you have questions, or require additional information, please call Glen Slonneger at 804\371-3140.

Thank you.

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
AND
DEPARTMENT FOR THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED

BRAILLE LITERACY SURVEY

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey; the information you furnish is essential for an accurate report to the Virginia General Assembly. Please complete and return by July 27.

If you have questions, or require additional information, call Glen Slonneger at 804\371-3140.

==========

NAME OF PERSON COMPLETING THIS SURVEY: 30

Title: _____

State: _____

1. Does your state have any legislation which requires Braille to be taught to blind and visually impaired children?

   (Circle One): YES - 3 NO - 27

   If YES, would you please send me a copy of that legislation.

2. Are you aware of any Braille instruction bills that are currently being considered by your state's General Assembly?

   (Circle One): YES - 3 NO - 26

   If YES, would you please send me a copy of that legislation.

3. How does your state determine if a child with a visual disability needs to receive Braille instruction?

4. If you use any formal evaluation to determine which children need to receive Braille, please list the title and publisher:

5. In your opinion, what criteria should be considered when determining which children with visual disabilities need to receive Braille instruction?

(Check all that apply)

23 (77%)	Formal Assessment
26 (87%)	Informal Assessment, such as teacher observation
15 (50%)	Acuity
0 (0%)	All Legally Blind children should receive braille
1 (3%)	All children with a visual acuity of 20/400 or worse
14 (47%)	Progressive Eye Disease
26 (87%)	Individual Education Program
10 (33%)	At Parent's Request
9 (30%)	Other (List):

Additional Comments:

6. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	AGREE	DISAGREE
a. All Legally Blind children should receive Braille instruction.	2 (7%)	25 (83%)
b. All children with a visual acuity of 20/400 or worse should receive Braille instruction.	2 (7%)	23 (92%)
c. All children with Progressive Eye Disease should receive Braille instruction.	5 (20%)	20 (80%)

Additional Comments:

7. After reviewing the text of the resolution (Attachment 1), please provide any other comments which you feel would be relevant to the study.

(SVC)

APPENDIX H

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
AND
DEPARTMENT FOR THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED

TO: Library Advisory Committee

FROM: Glen Slonneger, Supervisor
Programs for the Visually Impaired

SUBJECT: Braille Literacy Study (Senate Joint Resolution No. 36)

The 1990 General Assembly requested Virginia's Board of Education, in cooperation with the Department for the Visually Handicapped, to study the need to require school divisions to offer Braille instruction in their special education programs. In addition, the study is to evaluate the role of Braille instruction as a viable method of promoting literacy among all blind and visually handicapped students in the Commonwealth. See Attachment 1, "Senate Joint Resolution No. 36."

One part of the study deals with the manner in which Braille is currently being provided in Virginia's school divisions. In order to gather the most accurate information, we need your assistance.

As you can see from the text of the study resolution, the results could potentially affect the way in which Braille will be taught in Virginia. Would you please take ten minutes to complete the attached four-question survey (Attachment 2) and return it to Glen Slonneger by **July 27** at the following address:

Glen Slonneger
Virginia Department for the Visually Handicapped
397 Azalea Ave
Richmond, VA 23227

If you have questions, please contact Mr. Slonneger in writing at the above address or by telephone at 804/371-3140.

Thank you.

ATTACHMENT 2

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
AND
DEPARTMENT FOR THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 36 - SURVEY
Library Advisory Committee

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey; the information you furnish is essential for an accurate report to the General Assembly. Please complete and return by July 27.

If you have questions, or require additional information, call Mr. Slonneger at 804\371-3140.

NAME OF PERSON COMPLETING SURVEY: 6

City/County of Residence: _____

1. What criteria should be considered when determining which children with visual disabilities need to receive Braille instruction?

(Check all that apply)

3 (50%)	Formal Assessment
5 (83%)	Informal Assessment, such as teacher observation
5 (83%)	Acuity
5 (83%)	All Legally Blind children should receive Braille
5 (83%)	All children with a visual acuity of 20/400 or worse
6 (100%)	Progressive Eye Disease
2 (33%)	Individual Education Program
2 (33%)	At Parent's Request
2 (33%)	Others (List):

Additional Comments:

2. Do you know of any students who currently need Braille instruction, but who are not receiving it?

Circle one: YES - 0 NO - 5

If YES, please provide the child's name and school division so that we may review his/her Individual Education Program (IEP):

3. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	AGREE	DISAGREE
a. All Legally Blind children should receive Braille instruction.	3 (50%)	3 (50%)
b. All children with a visual acuity of 20/400 or worse should receive Braille instruction.	5 (83%)	1 (17%)
c. All children with Progressive Eye Disease should receive Braille instruction.	5 (83%)	1 (17%)

Additional Comments:

4. After reviewing the text of the resolution (Attachment 1), please provide any other comments which you feel would be relevant to the study.

SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESPONSES

	VISION TEACHERS		DIR OF SP ED		STATE VIS CON		COL & UNIV		LIB ADV COMM		TOTAL	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	51		79		30		11		6		177	
CRITERIA TO BE CONSIDERED												
a Formal Assess	32	63%	65	82%	23	77%	6	55%	3	50%	129	73%
b Informal Assess	48	94%	40	51%	26	87%	10	91%	5	83%	129	73%
c Acuity	32	63%	45	57%	15	50%	3	27%	5	83%	100	56%
d All Legally Blind	3	6%	14	18%	0	0%	0	0%	5	83%	22	12%
e All Children With 20/400 Acuity	4	8%	30	38%	1	3%	2	18%	5	83%	42	24%
f Progressive Eye Disease	30	59%	50	63%	14	47%	7	64%	6	100%	107	60%
g Individual Education Program	30	59%	68	86%	26	87%	11	100%	2	33%	137	77%
h At Parents Request	15	29%	14	18%	10	33%	4	36%	2	33%	45	25%
i Other	18	35%	4	5%	9	30%	5	45%	2	33%	38	21%
NUMBER OF CHILDREN RECEIVING BRAILLE FROM VISION TEACHER.	56		70									
DO YOU AGREE/DISAGREE WITH STATEMENT?												
a All Legally Blind Students Should Receive Braille.												
Agree	1	2%	21	28%	2	7%	2	18%	3	50%	29	17%
Disagree	50	98%	55	72%	25	93%	9	82%	3	50%	142	83%
b All 20/400 Students Should Receive Braille.												
Agree	4	8%	34	47%	2	8%	4	36%	5	83%	49	30%
Disagree	45	92%	39	53%	23	92%	7	64%	1	17%	115	70%
c All Students With Progress A Eye Problem Should Receive Braille.												
Agree	10	20%	38	53%	5	20%	3	33%	5	83%	61	38%
Disagree	40	80%	34	47%	20	80%	6	67%	1	17%	101	62%

SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESPONSES

	VISION TEACHERS		DIR OF SP ED		STATE VIS CON		COL & UNIV		LIB ADV COMM		TOTAL	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
DO YOU KNOW OF ANY STUDENT(S) WHO NEEDS BRAILLE AND IS NOT RECEIVING IT?												
yes	2	4%	2	3%					0	0%	4	3%
no	49	96%	77	97%					5	100%	131	97%
HAVE YOU TAUGHT BRAILLE IN COMBINATION WITH ANOTHER READING MEDIUM?												
a Braille & Large Print	13										13	
b Braille & Regular Print/L.V. Aid	8										8	
c Braille & Regular Print	2										2	
d Braille & Audio	38										38	
e Braille & Other	12										12	
TEACHERS FEEL THEY ARE PROFICIENT IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:												
a Grade 2 Braille	45	88%										
b Grade 3 Braille	1	2%										
c Nemeth Code	24	47%										
d Music Code	4	8%										
e Computer Code	5	10%										
f Electronic/Paperless Braille	11	22%										
g Slate and Stylus	36	71%										
h Other	7	14%										
TEACHERS FEEL THEY NEED TRAINING IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:												
a Grade 2 Braille	5	10%										
b Grade 3 Braille	36	71%										
c Nemeth Code	29	57%										
d Music Code	28	55%										
e Computer Code	38	75%										
f Electronic/Paperless Braille	32	63%										
g Slate and Stylus	12	24%										
h Other												

SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESPONSES

	VISION TEACHERS		DIR OF SP ED		STATE VIS CON		COL & UNIV		LIB ADV COMM		TOTAL	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
DOES SCHOOL DIVISION OFFER BRAILLE INSTRUCTION?												
yes			40	51%								
no			39	49%								
DOES YOUR STATE HAVE BRAILLE INSTRUCTION LEGISLATION?												
yes					3	10%						
no					27	90%						
ARE YOU AWARE OF ANY BRAILLE LEGISLATION BEING CONSIDERED BY YOUR STATE?												
yes					3	10%						
no					26	90%						

Testimony in Response to Senate Joint Resolution No. 36
Commonwealth of Virginia

of

The American Foundation for the Blind

by
Robert Esposito, Director
Mid-Atlantic Regional Center
and
Kathleen Mary Huebner, Ph.D., Director
National Services in Education,
Low Vision and Orientation & Mobility

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Director, National Services in
Education, Low Vision and
Orientation and Mobility
American Foundation for the Blind
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New York, NY 10011
(212) 620-2045

THE AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR THE BLIND
AND
ITS POSITION ON LITERACY FOR CITIZENS WHO ARE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

The American Foundation for the Blind (AFB), founded in 1921 through the inspiration of Helen Keller, is a national voluntary nonprofit research and consulting organization in the field of blindness. AFB's primary mission is to ensure the development, maintenance, and constant improvement of appropriate and quality services for blind and visually impaired people of all ages in the United States.

The American Foundation for the Blind supports the nationwide campaign for a more literate America, and specifically encourages efforts to improve opportunities for all blind and visually impaired to become literate citizens. AFB recognizes the importance of braille, and other alternative reading modes, as means to achieve the quality of life attainable by blind and visually impaired persons of all ages.

The American Foundation for the Blind has demonstrated it's commitment to the nationwide literacy effort in a variety of ways. For example, AFB:

* Has an active public education campaign to inform the public that literacy is an issue for blind and visually impaired Americans;

* Has published and widely disseminated a free publication titled, Braille Literacy: Issues for Blind Persons, Families, Professionals, and Producers of Braille, authored by AFB's Associate Executive Director of Program Services, Susan J. Spungin, Ed.D, (a copy is attached to this testimony);

* Is a charter and founding member of the Coalition for Information Access for Print Handicapped Readers;

* Is a founding member and maintains representation on the Braille Authority of North America;

* Has served on a National Advisory Committee to the Library of Congress, National Library Service, Division of the Blind and Physically Handicapped, and has recommended that it develop and administer a national standardized braille competency program for teachers, that would also be available for parents of blind and visually impaired children;

* Has participated in the development of national standards for teaching of braille reading and writing;

* Has published a special issue of the Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness on print and braille literacy (a copy is attached to this testimony);

* Has cooperated with the American Library Association to have readers who are blind included in Reading is Fundamental and National Library Week events;

* Makes available many of its publications in braille, audio tape and large print:

* Has several major national projects underway related to the literacy effort,including a traveling exhibit, research, and strategies for teaching braille reading and writing.

Further, the American Foundation for the Blind supports Public Law 94.142 and its subsequent regulations. Therefore, our comments related to Senate Joint Resolution No. 36 are founded on the American Foundation for the Blind's support of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act and the belief that:

> "There clearly is a growing awareness and concern about the decrease in braille reading and writing in the United States both from consumers using the braille system and from providers of service, who teach or produce materials in braille. This is not a new problem, but it is a growing one that can no longer be ignored." (Spungin, 1990 p.2)

REACTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 36

The American Foundation for the Blind supports and makes the following recommendations regarding Resolution No. 36.

1. AFB supports the resolution to study the need to offer braille instruction as part of special education programs in which blind children are enrolled.

   However, AFB recommends that the term legally blind" and the term "visually handicapped" be defined.

2. AFB supports the resolution that the Board of Education, in cooperation with the Department for the Visually Handicapped, conduct a study, and that as part of the study the organizations investigate and evaluate the role of braille instruction as a viable method of promoting literacy among blind and visually impaired students.

   AFB recommends that the Board of Education and the Department for the Visually Handicapped receive appropriate funding to conduct such a study and that experts in the area of braille reading and writing instruction be hired to supplement existing staff within the two departments as needed.

   AFB recommends that the word "all" be stricken from the phrase "evaluate the role of Braille instruction as a viable method of promoting literacy among "all" blind and visually handicapped students in the Commonwealth". The American Foundation for the Blind believes in the "individualization" and the "child centered" intent of the assessment and IEP processes mandated through P.L. 94.142. Therefore, although we support literacy efforts for all blind and visually impaired students; we do not believe that any one of the alternative methods available to standardized print reading and writing is the most efficient, effective or meaningful mode for all blind and visually impaired children. Indeed, many blind and visually impaired children can benefit from using a combination

of alternative media, such as braille and audio tapes, braille and optical aids, large print and optical aids and audio tapes, etc.

3. AFB strongly supports the directives of the resolution to determine: (1) the number of blind students who could benefit from braille instruction but who do not currently receive such instruction; (2) the appropriateness of requiring braille instruction to be offered to such students; and (3) evaluate the concurrent increases in costs associated with such instruction.

AFB recommends that within the study both primary and secondary learning (reading and writing) mediums be considered. A "primary reading medium is the medium most frequently used during classroom instruction...A secondary medium is occasionally appropriate for a student with functional vision" (Mangold & Mangold, 1989, JVIB p. 294.) However, it must also be recognized that for many students who pursue higher education and professional careers, many required reading materials are still unavailable in braille, and therefore nearly all blind and visually impaired students must learn to be auditory learners, because the reality is that they will need to use auditory tapes and readers in addition to braille and/or print.

Additional considerations to be included in the study and student assessments are those recommended by Mangold and Mangold (1989) for determining a primary learning medium. These are: (1) sufficient working distance from the page to maintain focus; (2) the ability to read back one's own handwriting (braille) should be a portable skill; (3) reading rates and accuracy, the average reading speed of adult braille readers is about 115 words per minute, although some read at more than 250 and others at more than 400 words per minute; (4) reading and writing fatigue levels using various mediums; and (5) objective assessment of student's performance and evaluation of rate of progress.

4. AFB further supports the need for instructional and administrative organization, instructional and support personnel, pre-service and in-service training, and the resources to support the implementation of any forthcoming recommendations.

AFB would like to emphasize the need for qualified, appropriately certified, and experienced personnel to

provide any pre-service and in-service training that may be required. Qualified, appropriately certified, and experienced personnel is defined as those individuals who have successfully completed an accredited college/university based undergraduate or graduate teacher training program in the are of blindness and visual impairments, and are certified as teachers of blind and visually impaired students. It is critical to understand that the knowledge of the braille code(s) is not sufficient to provide meaningful braille reading and writing instruction to children. Children learn to "read and write using the braille code"; therefore, to effectively teach children there must be a knowledge of child development, the unique learning styles and needs of blind/visually impaired children, pedagogy and techniques of teaching reading, and the knowledge of the braille codes. "A good curriculum should start with all we know about teaching, reading, and writing. Its sequence derives from a sequential arrangement of learning modules for the teacher and the learner to measure progress against a clearly defined, quantitative set of sequential goals" (Spungin, 1990, p.9)

Both financial and human resources will need to be made available to the Board of Education and the Department for the Visually Handicapped to conduct the required research, and forthcoming recommendations for pre-service and in-service training.

5. AFB fully supports the need to include experts in braille instruction and the education of blind and visually impaired children, parents, and advocates throughout this initiative.

Once again, it is imperative that it be understood that an individuals knowledge of the braille code(s) not be considered to be the only requirement for expertise in the teaching of reading and writing braille to blind and visually impaired children. 'Instruction in the reading and writing of braille should be based on what we know about teaching reading and writing" (Spungin, 1990, p.9)

AFB further recommends that efforts be made to ensure that the IEP process be effective by involving parents, the student whenever possible, and all relevant professionals in the planning process. The American Foundation for the Blind would appreciate the opportunity to stress that it believes that visually impaired children deserve the option of learning braille, print and listening skills. However, if the IEP process is truly implemented as it was intended, including appropriate assessments, there should not be a need for

additional legislation that addresses one of many of the unique skills required for effective learning by blind and visually impaired students.

In closing, the American Foundation for the Blind believes in the words of Helen Keller:

> "Books are the eyes of the blind...They keep us in touch with what people are thinking and doing. When I hold a book in my hand, my limitations fall from me and my spirit is free. I hope one day to see enough braille presses, libraries, schools, and training centers and teachers to assure all persons the opportunities they would have had, had they not been blind."

The American Foundation for the Blind appreciates the opportunity to provide this testimony and stands ready to be of assistance to the Commonwealth of Virginia considering this resolution as well as other issues related to individuals who are blind or visually impaired. I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have. Thank you.

Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired

FFICERS

RESIDENT
ni Heinze
Kalb, IL

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TIVE DIRECTOR
Megivern, J.D.

July 27, 1990

Mr. Glen Slonneger, Supervisor
Programs for the Visually Impaired
Department of Education
P.O. Box 6Q
Richmond, Virginia 23216

Dear Mr. Slonneger,

The following is the text of my testimony at the Braille Literacy Public Hearing on July 10, 1990.

My name is Barbara Bowman. I represent the Virginia Chapter of the Association of Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER), as president. In addition, I am here in my capacity as the Education Representative of the Southeast Region to the International Board of AER.

AER is the only professional membership organization dedicated to the advancement of education and rehabilitation of blind and visually impaired children and adults.

I'd like to address the specific points raised within Senate Joint Resolution No. 36 and House Joint Resolution No. 74

Braille is a vital tool for literacy for totally blind persons; it can be, and often is, a tool for literacy for persons who have a visual impairment - but have some remaining usable sight. However, there are many "low vision" individuals who can be literate using print, and never have a need for braille. To imply that no person who has a visual impairment can be literate without braille is a misprepresentation.

No one would argue that persons with visual impairments should not be given every opportunity to become literate; the real question is: what medium should be used to gain that literacy. This should be determined on an individual basis, when the indivdual needs have been evaluated.

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) process is alive and well in Virginia, and children are receiving braille instruction. The multidisciplinary approach of the IEP team, allows for many experts, to come together

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with the parents, in order to discuss the student's developmental and educational needs. At this time all things are considered: what is the vision condition, is it a stable condition - or will it improve or deteriorate, are there other pre-existing conditions such as mental retardation, learning disability, other physical impairments, etc. If the educators, psychologist, social worker, medical specialists, parents, and in some instances the child, all of whom comprise the IEP team, determine a need for braille instruction, it is written into the IEP, and it becomes a legal requirement for the school system to provide the instruction. Most school systems in Virginia do employ certified teachers of the visually impaired who can provide the braille instruction. In instances where there is no vision teacher, the Department for the Visually Handicapped can provide this instruction.

Some children who have some progressive degenerative eye diseases may eventually be unable to read large print; these children should learn to read braille. Again, it is a misrepresentation to say that all people who have degenerative eye diseases will eventually be uable to read large print.

Quality programs for braille instruction do require competent well-trainied vision teachers. The Commonwealth of Virignia has a strong itinerant vision program and a cadre of trained teachers; in addition, the Virginia Department for the Visually Handicapped provides support services as well as direct instruction.

It is of utmost importance that legally blind children be provided an opportunity to literacy. Braille instruction can be an effective tool toward literacy for some legally blind children. Braille is not the appropriate means for all legally blind children to gain literacy - many will always be able to access print, and some who are multihandicapped will never be able to learn braille or print.

The implementation of regulations to require local school divisions to offer braille instruction for legally blind students could readliy have a negative effect on assisting these students toward literacy. I quote Dr. Susan J. Spungin, Associate Executive Director for Program Services with the American Foundation for the Blind, from the pamphlet Braille Literacy, "We have in place a potentially good system

in P.L. 94-142...To legislate or mandate any system of human services always creates problems of interpretation, monitoring and funding...To create new legislation state-by-state to address the problems of

the federal law seems redundant". New legislation will contradict and duplicate P.L. 94-142.

In addition, if legislation requires that school divisions provide braille instruction to legally blind children, those who really need the instruction will ultimately be short-changed. It is no secret that there is a national shortage of personnel in the field of education and rehabilitation of the blind and visually impaired. People are simply not choosing to go into this field of work. We would have to rely on the existing teachers to provide the instruction. Teachers would be stretched unnecessarily to provide braille instruction to many children who can satisfactorily access print. The totally blind children and children with eye conditions which limit or will limit their ability to read print, who need one-to-one instruction on a regular basis, will lose, because time will not allow teachers to work with all legally blind children.

Litigation will ultimately ensue. In this scenario, who will have actually gained? Legislation will have mandated that braille instruction be provided to all legally blind children, many of whom do not actually need it; school systems will not be able to accomodate this. Litigation will not solve the problem.

This situation, the efficacy of SJR No. 36 and HJR No. 74, really funnels into three main issues. The first issue is literacy - that all legally blind persons in Virginia be provided the opportunity for literacy. The Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired completely supports this point.

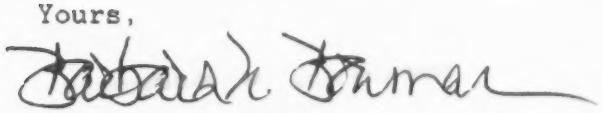
The second issue is that of process - how is literacy for legally blind persons achieved? The answer to this is, that it is achieved in a variety of ways. Individual needs vary tremendoulsly; two people who have the same eye disease will have different manifestations of it. Therefore, achieving literacy for visually impaired persons is a dynamic process, involving constant evaluation and reevaluation. Some students will just learn braille. Some will just learn print; and some students will learn to use both mediums, supplemented by low vision aids, closed circuit televisions, and recorded material. The Association for Education of the Blind and Visually Impaired supports this process approach to literacy.

The third issue is that of legislation. A legislative mandate is no guarantee that the thing we want accomplished, will be. It is also extremely important

to be very sure of what it is that should be legislated. A mandate that legally blind children be taught braille is not the real crux of the issue. The real issue and concern should be that all visually impaired children be afforded the opportunity of literacy, based on their unique and individual needs and abilities, regardless of whether it is through braille, print, or some combination. This is what the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired supports.

We, as concerned citizens of the Commonwealth of Virginia, educators and rehabilitators of the blind and visually impaired, blind and visually impaired individuals, parents of blind and visually impaired children, should address ourselves not to duplicating the efforts of P.L. 94-142 with another piece of legislation, but rather to working together to gurantee that the existing law be implemented properly for all children who have visual disabilites. Furthermore, we should work to encourage teachers into the field of education of the visually impaired, work to develop a teacher training program in our state, and work to enhance existing service delivery to visually impaired children by furthering the "process" approach to affording literacy.

Yours,



Barbara N. Bowman

Glenwood R. Floyd, President
Central Virginia Council of the Blind
1707 Shewalt Drive
Richmond, va. 23228

July 25, 1990

Mr. Glen Slonneger
Program Director
Special Education Services -- DVH
397 Azalea Ave.
Richmond, VA. 23227

Dear Sir:

This document is to serve as the official position of the officers and members of the Central Virginia Council of the Blind in reference to the "Braille Literacy Study" and any legislative bill that may be proposed as a result of the study.

The membership of Central Virginia Council of the Blind is in complete agreement on the following points:

* The availability of Braille instruction should "ALWAYS" be included in the operational framework of every educational service jurisdiction in the Commonwealth of Virginia

* Each education district must have one or more persons in their instructional/teaching staff who is very competant in reading Braille using the tactile method of reading (regardless of whether the person is fully or partially sighted or totally blind); can competantly instruct partially sighted or totally blind persons to read Braille using tactile perception; can instruct partially sighted and totally blind persons Braille cell structure and contraction/word recognition for grads 1, 2, and 3 Braille plus the "Nemath code" for mathematical notation; can instruct partially sighted and totally blind persons to write Braille using the slate and stylus combination and thePerkins Brailler or comparable quality of multi-strike brailling apparatus; and can use the slate and stylus or a Perkins Brailler or comparable quality multi-strike brailling device to a Braille document of good readable quality in a timely manner
(This addresses the qualifications of the instructor)

* Braille instruction will not be denied to anyone certified as "legally blind" regardless of their

age or educational district in which they may reside.

* The fact that a person is certified as legally blind should not be the only criteria for making Braille a required course of study. The mandate to learn Braille should be issued only in situations involving totally blind children or partially sighted children who would not be able to learn to read printed material or who cannot continue to read and understand printed material due to decreasing visual acuity because of internal physical processes or external environmental conditions

* Persons certified as legally blind, but who have sufficient vision to achieve a high level of print literacy using large print and/or other methods available to them including the electronic devices designated as "CCTV' s, computer units with speech synthesizers, and other available technology should be forced to learn Braille if their vision is determined as being stable

* All educational districts and the Department for the Visually Handicapped should seek qualified and certified Braille instructors to meet the coming demand that is being created by the extended life cycle of citizens of the Commonwealth, many of whom will experience severe or total vision loss in their advanced years

* The Dept. for the Visually Handicapped and the Va. Dept. of Education should establish a minimum of three (3) regional centers for the instruction of Braille (both reading and writing) and the proper use of the Brailling apparatii: the slate and stylus, and the mechanical Braille writer/embosser; these centers which are to be located in institutions of higher learning (universities), are to also serve as centers of competancy certification in the area of Braille skilles which includes reading, writing/embossing, teaching methods, and instructional presentation

* Advanced methods of Braille writing/embossing should be taught to a person only after he/she has reached a level of understanding and competancy that will allow he/she to perform in an above average manner in their school, work, social, or general environment with minimal stress

More points could be presented as sub-divisions of some of the points listed above, but that is deemed unnecessary by one major point: The general assembly in the Commonwealth of Virginia passed a piece of legislation in 1990 that is now part of the Code of Virginia. This bill currently guarantees the right of every partially sighted or blind Virginian to the right to receive Braille instruction as needed within any educational district in the Commonwealth of Virginia. This bill imposed no mandates upon the "would be" student to learn Braille merely because he or she is certified as legally blind, but instead insures that all who have the need to learn Braille coupled with the desire

for literacy in the Braille medium will have guaranteed access to the necessary resources.

The basic concensus of our collected opinion is as follows:
The above points are components of a very stron and positively reinforced system of Braille instruction provision in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

However, based on the current existence of a state law as represented in the amendment and reenactment of section 22.1-217 of the Code of Virginia governing the special education service availability and delivery, Braille instruction is guaranteed to all persons who need it. The only needs test is that of being certified as visually impaired or blind.

Eventhough section 22.1-217 does not contain all of the points above in explicit written form, it does mandate that all persons (regardless of age) be given Braille instruction based on need as reflected in the IEP either through the Individual Education Division or the Department for the Visually Handicapped

We therefore proclaim that no need for further legislation is required or necessary unless it is deemed appropriate to expand the current code by including the provisions for creation of Braille instruction (reading/writing/embossing) and certification centers for Braille instructors in the state of Virginia, and other points that are important to "preparedness and delivery" component of providing the service. Otherwise, the only element missing is the strict supervision of the Individual Education Districts by the Virginia Board of Education in adhering to the guidelines of service availability, staff preparedness, and direct provision of Braille instruction. The Department for the Visually Handicapped should assist the Virginia Board of Education in supervising the education districts in adhering to both state and federal regulations and to provide a consistantly high level of support in both pre-service delivery preparation and direct Braille instruction delivery.

The need for more legislation is further reduced by the existence of the federal law 94-142 which is quite explicit in describing the provision of Braille instruction. The section of federal law 94-142 regarding the provision of services to blind and/or visually impaired persons and Code of Virginia section 22.1-271 state the intended purpose well with reference to why each was proposed and adopted into law.

For those individuals for whom Braille is a viable alternative mode of literacy, the instruction is available. For those persons who are blind or visually impaired due to diabetes, and have severe loss of touch sensitivity Braille is not a viable option and "should not" be mandated as the only or primary source of communication (reading/writing/ Braille embossing) to which they are exposed and receive instruction. Many other totally blind or visually impaired persons fall into this category due to the cause of vision loss or due to a secondary handicap. It would be a social

catastrophe to force a mandated plan of instruction upon them when they are unable to physically perceive the material before them. The results would be the same if the blind or visually impaired person had a secondary disability that was cognitive in nature. The cause would be different but the result would be the same producing negative reinforcement.

We strongly support Braille literacy for those who can use it as a functional option or as the main tool in the quest for literacy and communication skills of high quality.

Central Virginia Council of the Blind is willing to serve as a consulting organization in reference to this Braille Literacy Study or any other matter that may impact upon the educational, economic, social, recreational, job potential, or job maintenance of blind or visually impaired persons in the Richmond regional area or throughout the Commonwealth. We thank you for giving us the opportunity to submit this "position document".

You may contact the organization by writing:

Glenwood R. Floyd, President
Central Virginia Council of the Blind
1707 Shewalt Drive
Richmond, Virginia 23228

or by calling:

Home- (804) 264-0518 or
Work- (804) 367-0723.

Respectfully,

Glenwood R. Floyd

Glenwood R. Floyd, President
Central Virginia Council of the Blind

National Federation of the Blind of Virginia, Incorporated

August 22, 1990

Mr. Glenn Slonneger
Virginia Department for the
Visually Handicapped
397 Azalea Ave.
Richmond, VA 23227

Dear Mr. Slonneger:

I am writing to you concerning our organization's position with respect to the current Braille study.

Enclosed are two resolutions adopted by our membership, which deal with Braille instruction in the schools. In addition at the public hearing in July, I provided you with other documents dealing with Braille. The enclosed resolutions together with the previously submitted documents constitute our organization's views with respect to the study.

Sincerely,

Charles S. Brown

Charles S. Brown
President
6563 Williamsburg Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22213
(703) 534-0747

Enclosures

RESOLUTION 9004:

Whereas Braille is the medium of literacy among blind and partially blind persons; and

Whereas it is imperative that all blind and partially blind persons have the right to expect quality Braille instruction; and

Whereas blind and partially blind students should be required and expected to exhibit competency in Braille literacy at the completion of their high school education; and

Whereas the Virginia Department of Education has been mandated to conduct a study of the appropriateness of Braille as a viable alternative technique;

Therefore, be it resolved that the NFBV in convention assembled this 8th day of April, 1990, in the City of Harrisonburg, seek every opportunity to participate actively in this study; and

Be it further resolved that the NFBV advocate for competency requirements for both students and teachers of Braille; and

Be it further resolved that the NFBV push for the adoption of legislation and/or regulations that will ensure teacher and student competency requirements.

RESOLUTION 89-03

WHEREAS we as blind people know that braille is a vital tool for communication, independence, and, most of all, literacy; and
WHEREAS the educational system of Virginia continues to fail to make this alternative technique available as a choice in the education of our blind children; NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED by the National Federation of the Blind of Virginia in convention assembled this Second day of April in the city of Lynchburg, Virginia, that this organization supports the introduction and passage of a bill offering the choice of braille for our blind children; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Virginia Department for the Visually Handicapped and public school systems encourage the use of braille by legally blind children.

APPENDIX N

Mr. J. McCann
5501 Seminary Road #301 South
Falls Church, Virginia 22041
July 23, 1990

Virginia Department for the Visually Handicapped
397 Azalea Avenue
Richmond, Virginia 23227
Attention: Mr. G. Slonneger

Dear Mr. Slonneger:

The following written comments are submitted for the record by the Old Dominion Council of rhte Blind and Visually Impaired in relation to the xxx legislative study considering the mandatory teaching of braille to all legally blind elementary and high school students.

1. We believe that the matter of braille instruction is one that can best be resolved within the blindness community (consumers and providers/professionals) without legislative mandates. Furtner, we feel that decisions whether or not to introduce braille should be made on an individual basis taking into account all relevant factors; i.e., amount of visually acuity, likelihood of retaining that xxx acuity, absence or presence of neuropothy, etc.
2. We understand and appreciate the impetus for this legislative study, and we herein state our concern that economic and other consiiderations sometimes operate to discourage the teaching of braille where this medium is appropriate. For totally blind and nearly totally blind students, braille is the only medium for gaining true facility in the written English language; i.e., braille, as it conveys the spelling of words, is the only medium to assure true literacy. Likewise, braille is indispensible for representing mathematical and scientific equations.
3. Where a student's individual education plan calls for instruction in braille, this instruction must be at a level of intensity and duration that assures true facility in the medium given the considerations set forth in paragraph 2 above.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

Jon n A. McCann

President: Old Dominion
Council of the Blind
and Visually Impaired

THE BLIND NEED BRAILLE

As members of the National Federation of the Blind, we feel that every blind individual, regardless of the amount of his visual loss, should be guaranteed the right to learn and use Braille if he is unable to read regular print at a normal distance, with good speed, with good tolerance, and without eyestrain. We of the NFB do not discount the importance of audio recordings and large print, but, if they are used, Braille should also be utilized. Too many blind persons, both children and adults, are being denied instruction in Braille. Some are given the impression that Braille is a second-class communication tool reserved only for those who have to read it because they can't use print. Too often we hear comments to the effect that a certain student uses print while another student has to use Braille. Others are encouraged to read print, large print, or magnified print at ridiculously slow speeds, for very limited periods of time, with eyestrain, and with vision that can fluctuate from day to day. Still others are told that Braille is out-of-date, too difficult to master, too bulky, and not readily available.

We feel the most fundamental reason for denying Braille to people is that too many of those who are charged with educating and rehabilitating the blind lack positive attitudes about blindness, attitudes which are the foundation of the National Federation of the Blind. We of the NFB believe that it is respectable to be blind. The blind are no different from the sighted except they are unable to see. In our opinion, blindness is a nuisance and an inconvenience; it is a disability or handicap only to the extent to which the blind person allows it to be. We feel that the tools of blindness such as Braille are just as relevant as the tools of the sighted such as print. Just as the sighted would not appreciate being denied the opportunity to learn and use print, so the blind do not appreciate being denied the study and utilization of Braille. It is our desire that every blind person be given the opportunity to be as independent as he wishes to be and is able to be. As there are numerous types of sighted individuals, likewise, there are just as many types of blind persons. The old stereotypes of blindness are misleading and can be extremely detrimental to the blind.

Braille is denied to the blind in all too many instances because professionals in the field of blindness are not themselves proficient in the various codes which are a part of the Braille system. Even worse, many of these workers for the blind show little motivation towards learning the various Braille codes. Is not much of this a direct result of lack of positive attitudes about blindness on the part of those who claim to have all the expertise concerning the education and rehabilitation of the blind?

Other reasons given for not teaching Braille can be found. There are claims that teachers have too much else to teach to give Braille instruction. Lack of money to adequately fund Braille instruction is often the lament. It is alleged that teachers don't

have the opportunity to be properly trained themselves in the use of Braille. It seems many teachers would rather do a large share of their students work instead of teaching them Braille so they could be more independent in their studies and thus gain a greater degree of self-esteem and independence.

As important as large print, magnified print, and audio materials are, we feel that Braille should be available to complement these modes of learning. It can be most frustrating using print given wide variations in such things as print quality, print fonts, type of paper, lighting, magnification, time restraints, and personal tolerance. With good Braille proficiency, these frustrations can be diminished or even eliminated. There are severe limitations when using audio materials. True literacy is not achieved. The user of these materials does not learn language skills such as spelling and grammar as he could if he were proficient in Braille. It is most difficult to gain mastery of math and science without being an effective Braille user. As helpful as voice synthesizers are in work with computers, there is still a great need for a good working knowledge of Braille including the Computer Braille Code. Anyone interested in music should be competent in the use of the Braille Music Code.

This year, with concerted effort from the National Federation of the Blind of Virginia, a "Braille Bill" has been adopted by the state legislature. During its journey through the legislature, the bill was amended through efforts of the Virginia Department for the Visually Handicapped to propose that the entire matter be studied by the Virginia Department of Education and the VDVH for another year.

While a study is going on, blind individuals, mostly children but also adults, will be denied Braille instruction. Functional illiteracy among the blind will increase, for without Braille, the blind are unable to effectively master the various components of written language. Many blind persons will be deprived of a means of increasing their self-esteem and will be held back from gaining the level of independence they desire. Also, many who are blind will be hindered in their pursuit of educational and vocational goals because of not being proficient in the various Braille codes.

We of the NFB feel strongly that Braille is essential for the blind. Likewise, we believe that all blind children and adults must be guaranteed the right to study and use Braille in all education and rehabilitation settings. Until this right is guaranteed, blind people cannot fully realize the security, equality, and opportunity to which they are entitled.

Marshall I. Jordan — July 3 1990

Signature — Date

Marshall I. Jordan
President, Richmond Area Federation of the Blind

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
P.O. BOX 6Q
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA 23216

NOTICE

BRAILLE LITERACY PUBLIC HEARING

The 1990 General Assembly requested Virginia's Board of Education, in cooperation with the Department for the Visually Handicapped, to study the need to require school divisions to offer Braille instruction in their special education programs. In addition, the study is to evaluate the role of Braille instruction as a viable method of promoting literacy among all blind and visually handicapped students in the Commonwealth. See Attachment 1 for the full text of Senate Joint Resolution No. 36; this is identical to House Joint Resolution No. 74.

A public hearing concerning Braille literacy will be conducted on Tuesday, July 10, 1990, from 6:30 PM to 10:00 PM at the Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind at 401 Azalea Avenue, Richmond, Virginia 23227. In order to ensure that public hearing comments are accurately received, we would appreciate your submitting them in written form also.

If you are unable to attend the public hearing, written comments can be sent to Mr. Glen Slonneger, Supervisor, Programs for the Visually Impaired, Department of Education, PO Box 6Q, Richmond, Virginia, 23216. Please send comments before July 27, 1990.

Inquiries with regard to either the General Assembly bills or the public hearing should be directed to Mr. Glen Slonneger (804/371-3140).

23. Proposed § 5.1 10 is revised to define "abandonment" as intentional and unjustified failure to complete work. The proposed regulation also states that unjustified cessation of work for 90 days or more shall be considered evidence of abandonment. These changes should allow for a more precise application of this regulation in cases where allegations of abandonment are brought to the board.

24. Proposed § 5.1 13 is altered to further clarify this provision. No effect from this change is anticipated.

25. Proposed § 5.1 14 allows the board to consider disciplinary action against a contractor whose sole proprietor, officer of the corporation, general partner of the partnership, member of the association, or designated employee has been convicted or found guilty of any felony or of a misdemeanor involving lying, cheating, or stealing. This proposal ensures that those currently licensed/registered continue to meet the standards required for entry, thus protecting the public.

26. Proposed § 5.1 15 requires all regulants to report to the board any conviction as outlined in proposed § 5.1 15 within 30 days of the conviction or guilty plea. The regulation will allow the board to take disciplinary action against any regulant who conceals this information.

27. Proposed § 5.1 16 allows the board to consider disciplinary action against a contractor whose sole proprietor, officer of the corporation, general partner of the partnership, member of the association, or designated employee has been disciplined by any county, city, town, or any state or federal governing body. This proposal ensures that those currently licensed/registered continue to meet the standards required for entry, thus protecting the public.

8. Proposed § 5.1 17 requires all regulants to comply with the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code. The regulation will allow the board to take disciplinary action against any regulant who violates the Code.

tatutory Authority: § 54.1-1102 of the Code of Virginia.

/ritten comments may be submitted until September 2, 990.

ontact: Kelly G. Ragsdale, Assistant Director, 3600 W. road St., Richmond, VA 23230, telephone (804) 367-8557 r toll-free 1-800-552-3016.

COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS RESOURCES BOARD - MIDDLE VIRGINIA

Board of Directors

ıly 5, 1990 - 7 p.m. – Open Meeting

August 2, 1990 - 7 p.m. – Open Meeting
502 South Main Street #4, Culpeper, Virginia

From 7 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. the Board of Directors will hold a business meeting to discuss DOC contract, budget, and other related business. Then the board will meet to review cases for eligibility to participate with the program. It will review the previous month's operation (budget and program related business).

Contact: Lisa Ann Peacock, Program Director, 502 S. Main St. #4, Culpeper, VA 22701, telephone (703) 825-4562

DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE SERVICES (BOARD OF)

August 1, 1990 - 10:30 a.m. – Public Hearing
Charlottesville City Council Chambers, 2nd Floor, 605 East Main Street, Charlottesville, Virginia.

Notice is hereby given in accordance with § 9-6.14:7.1 of the Code of Virginia that the Department of Criminal Justice Services intends to adopt regulations entitled: **VR 240-02-02. Regulations Governing the Privacy and Security of Criminal History Record Information Checks for Firearm Purchase.** The proposed regulations will ensure the identity, confidentiality and security of all records and data provided by the Department of State Police regarding criminal record checks for firearm purchase.

Statutory Authority: §§ 9-170 21 and 18.2-308.2:2 H of the Code of Virginia.

Written comments may be submitted until July 7, 1990, to Charlotte McClamroch, Department of Criminal Justice Services, 805 E. Broad St., Richmond, VA 23219.

Contact: Ms. Paula Scott, Executive Assistant, Department of Criminal Justice Services, 805 E. Broad St., Richmond, VA 23219, telephone (804) 786-4000

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND DEPARTMENT FOR THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED

† **July 10, 1990 - 6:30 p.m. – Public Hearing**
Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind, 401 Azalea Avenue, Richmond, Virginia. ⓐ (Interpreter for deaf provided if requested)

A public hearing to evaluate the role of braille instruction as a viable method of promoting literacy among all blind and visually handicapped students of the Commonwealth (SJR 36 and HJR 74).

Contact: Glen R. Slonneger, Jr., 397 Azalea Ave., Richmond, VA 23227-3697, telephone (804) 371-3140.

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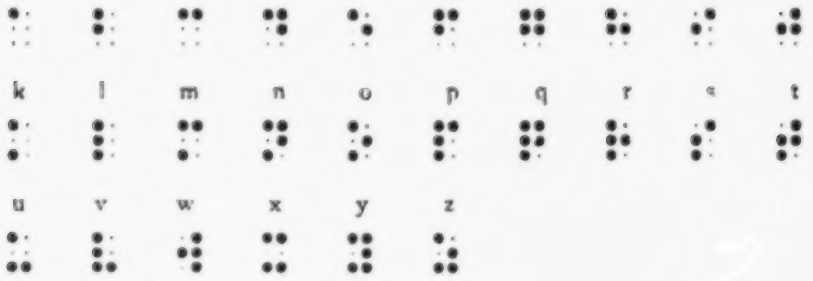

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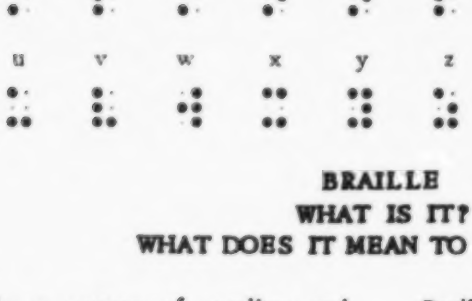
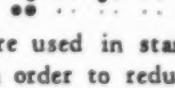


BRAILLE
WHAT IS IT?
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO THE BLIND?

Braille is a system of reading and writing by touch used by the blind. It consists of arrangements of dots which make up letters of the alphabet, numbers and punctuation marks. The basic Braille symbol is called the Braille cell and consists of six dots arranged in the formation of a rectangle, three dots high and two across. Other symbols consist of only some of these six dots. The six dots are commonly referred to by number according to their position in the cell:

There are no different symbols for capital letters in Braille. Capitalization is accomplished by placing a dot 6 in the cell just before the letter that is capitalized. The first ten letters of the alphabet are used to make numbers. These are preceded by a number sign which is dots 3-4-5-6:

Thus, 1 is number sign a; 2 is number sign b; 10 is number sign a-j and 193 is number sign a-i-c:



Some abbreviations are used in standard American Braille in order to reduce its bulk. These must be memorized, but most Braille readers and writers find them convenient, rather than a problem. Braille is written on heavy paper, and the raised dots prevent the pages from lying smoothly together as they would in a print book. Therefore, Braille books are quite bulky.

There are two methods of writing Braille, just as there are two methods of writing print. A Braille writing machine (comparable to a typewriter) has a keyboard of only six keys and a space bar, instead of one key for each letter of the alphabet. These keys can be pushed separately or altogether. If they are all pushed at the same time they will cause six dots to be raised on the paper in the formation of a Braille cell. Pushing various combinations of the keys on the Braille writer produces different letters of the alphabet and other Braille symbols.

Writing Braille with a slate and stylus compares to writing print with a pen or pencil. The stylus is used to push dots down through the paper, while the slate serves as a guide. The Braille slate can be made of metal or plastic and is hinged so that there is a guide under the paper and on top of it. A person writing Braille with the slate and stylus begins at the right side of the paper and ends the line on the left, since the dots are being produced on the underside of the paper. Of course, the Braille reader reads from left to right,

for the dots are then on the top side of the paper. Although this may seem a bit confusing, it need not be at all troublesome, since both reading and writing progress through words and sentences from beginning to end in the same manner. The speed of writing Braille with the slate and stylus is about the same as the speed of writing print with pen or pencil.

Braille was first developed about 1820 by a young Frenchman named Louis Braille. He created Braille by modifying a system of night writing which was intended for use on board ships. He did this work as a very young man and had it complete by the time he was about 18. He and his friends at the school for the blind he attended found that reading and writing dots was much faster than reading raised print letters which could not be written by hand at all. The development of this system by young Louis Braille is now recognized as the most important single development in making it possible for the blind to get a good education.

It took more than a century, however, before people would accept Braille as an excellent way for the blind to read and write. Even today many people underestimate the effectiveness of Braille. While tapes and records are enjoyable, Braille is essential for note-taking and helpful for studying such things as math, spelling and foreign languages. It is a matter of great concern to members of the National Federation of the Blind that fewer blind people now have the opportunity to become good Braille users than twenty five years ago.

Why is this? Many professionals in work with the blind stress recorded media with blind children. Many persons who become blind do so in old age and are not encouraged to spend the time and make the effort needed to develop the new reading and writing skills that depend on feeling rather than seeing. There are even Braille teachers who do not expect speed and accuracy of blind students. The students then learn Braille as a chore and a drudgery.

Experienced Braille readers, however, read Braille at speeds comparable to print readers—200 to 400 words a minute. Such Braille readers say that the only limitation of Braille is that there isn't enough material available. They want more books produced by Braille presses, more books produced by volunteer Braillists in their homes and more advances in the computerized production of Braille.

One of the goals of the National Federation of the Blind is to help people appreciate Braille for the efficient system it is. The main difference between print and Braille is simply that print is meant to be read with the eyes, while Braille is meant to be read with the fingertips. Fingers feel dots quickly and accurately; eyes see loops and lines of ink. In both cases it is the brain that processes and reacts to the raw data sent to it by the fingers or the eyes.

This article was first written in Braille and transcribed into print to answer the questions of sighted people who cannot read Braille.

If you have further questions about Braille or blindness, write to the:

National Federation of the Blind
1800 Johnson Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21230

APPENDIX S

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

A. Position Statements and Recommendations from Consumer and Professional Organizations

The following six organizations responded:

1. American Foundation for the Blind
2. Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired
3. Central Virginia Council of the Blind
4. Old Dominion Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired
5. Richmond Area Federation of the Blind
6. National Federation of the Blind of Virginia

In these statements there was consensus that every student with a visual disability should have the opportunity to receive Braille instruction if he is unable to read print with good speed, tolerance and comprehension. In addition, there was consensus that Braille instruction must be taught by individuals who are proficient in the various codes. There was general support for evaluating every child individually and then teaching the appropriate reading medium(s). However, there was some disagreement whether additional legislation or requirements needed to be established.

B. Surveys

Surveys were sent to the following categories of individuals who are not represented by a consumer or professional organization in Virginia:

1. Vision Program Teachers
2. Virginia's Directors of Special Education
3. State-level Vision Consultants from the other 49 states
4. College and University Vision Program Coordinators
5. Advisory Committee for the State Library for the Visually and Physically Handicapped

There was general consensus that Braille is appropriate for some, not all, children with visual disabilities. The majority of respondents felt that each child should be evaluated individually, using a variety of evaluation instruments and that the IEP process should be used to determining which children need Braille instruction.

C. PUBLIC HEARING

A public hearing, chaired by Delegate Van Landingham, was conducted on July 10, 1990. Notification was went to five newspapers: Richmond Times-Dispatch, The Washington Post, The

Virginia-Pilot, Bristol Herald Courier, and Roanoke Times and World News. In addition the notice was included in the Virginia Register and the Department for Rights of Virginians with Disabilities' "Action Alert." Individual notices were sent to all Directors of Special Education and to twenty-eight consumer and professional organizations.

Twenty-two individuals presented comments at the hearing and nine additional citizens or organizations sent written comments. Those citizens presenting comments included parents, represents of consumer and professional organizations, school divisions, and Braille instructors.

The comments touched on many topics and represented differing points of view, but there was general agreement that Braille is a viable method of promoting literacy. In addition, there was general consensus that each child should be evaluated individually and from this evaluation, the appropriate reading medium selected. Several participants emphasized the importance of having Braille teachers who are adequately trained to teach Braille. Some voiced concern that the IEP committees are not considering Braille as one option of instruction.

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mr. Glen Slonneger
Program and Policy Specialist
for Infant, Children and Youth

FROM: Mr. John C. Pleasants, Chairman
Virginia Schools for the Deaf
and Blind Advisory Committee

DATE: October 18, 1990

RE: Committee Recommendation on Braille Literacy

We, the Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind Advisory Committee, are in support of the findings of the report on Braille literacy.

It is our feeling, however, that guidelines should be formulated to determine what persons should use Braille as an alternative and that a committee composed of teachers of Braille from LEA's and the two VSDB's and one blind consumer would appear appropriate.

Lastly, we are somewhat concerned that there have been no complaints with regard to those students not receiving Braille instruction and we would like to see a more thorough survey conducted along those lines.

Any assistance we can offer in promoting Braille literacy, we will gladly provide.